

# Protecting Vulnerable Adults

A Consultation on Safeguarding Adults  
July 2014

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## INTRODUCTION

Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham is the voice of local service users. Our role is to ensure that the views of local residents are heard by decision makers, and that their opinions influence the way that services are delivered. We are independent and therefore do not have a pre-set agenda or a pre-determined interest in influencing the outcome of the results of a consultation.

This report outlines the view of respondents who answered a series of 10 questions posed by Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham on behalf of the Safeguarding Adult Board (SAB). This survey contributes to the public consultation undertaken by the SAB as part of drafting the Adult Safeguarding Strategy for the London borough of Barking and Dagenham.

Between April and July 2014, Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham visited a number of events and open days and engaged with the community. We asked adults about their experience and knowledge of protecting vulnerable adults.

This document represents a collective public response to the consultation and is a random sample which has been anonymised. This has been conducted impartially - Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham have no organisational view.

Copies of this report are available by contacting Barking and Dagenham Healthwatch on 020 8596 8200 or by emailing [info@healthwatchbarkinganddagenham.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchbarkinganddagenham.co.uk).

Copies are also downloadable from our website: [www.healthwatchbarkinganddagenham.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchbarkinganddagenham.co.uk).

## BACKGROUND

The Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Adults Board is a partnership which was constituted under the Department of Health guidance: 'No Secrets' (March 2000). The Board has an Independent Chair, who supports the partnership to work together to safeguard adults at risk of harm.

The Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Adults Board brings together a variety of local statutory and voluntary organisations to lead and co-ordinate the local strategy to safeguard adults.

Since the establishment of the national and local Healthwatch Teams in 2012, Healthwatch automatically has a seat on the Safeguarding Adults Board. Healthwatch also has a statutory duty to contribute to the local Adult Safeguarding Strategy.

The Board objectives are in line with those set nationally by the Statement of Government Policy on Adult Safeguarding, and include:

**Empowerment:** Presumption of person led decisions and informed consent

**Protection:** Support and representation for those in greatest need

**Prevention:** It is better to take action before harm occurs

**Proportionality:** Proportionate and least intrusive response appropriate to the risk presented

**Partnership:** Local solutions through services working with their communities. Communities have a part to play in preventing, detecting and reporting neglect and abuse.

In line with these objectives Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham has consulted with the local community to better understand how empowered they feel to contribute to the protection of those at risk of harm, or what else the council might put in place to help them make a contribution.

## SUMMARY

Through attendance at a variety of public events Healthwatch has received 149 completed responses to our questionnaires. We engaged with a wide variety of people and are pleased to say that 40% of the responses came from young people who use the services of the Vibe youth centre. For this valuable contribution we are grateful to our Associate Board member Grace Kihu.

Results from the questionnaires show that 56% of respondents were confident they would know how to recognise the signs of adult abuse and knew who to contact if they wanted to report a case. Almost 30% were not confident they would recognise the signs of abuse, while 40% did not know or were unsure of who they would report it to.

A variety of answers were given for who the abuse might be reported to with the Police being the single largest agency that respondents felt they would turn to for help.

A large number of people (84%) felt there was not enough information around to help the public to report incidents. People feel there should be more easy read literature, posters and general information about the signs of abuse and who to report it to.

Whilst 59% of respondents said they felt confident to report an incident of possible abuse, 32% said they did not. Almost a third of respondents said that fear of reprisal would be the main thing that would stop them from reporting it.

Confidentiality, a free phone line and more information about what to look for and where to report it to, were the top three answers given by respondents when asked what would help them overcome difficulties in passing on information about possible abuse.

## METHOD

In seeking the public view on the protection of adults at risk the Healthwatch team worked closely with the Safeguarding Adults Team.

It was decided that focus would be given to two distinct groups:

- adults and their families who had experienced the Safeguarding procedure first hand as they had been involved in an incident in some way and
- members of the public who were randomly selected and were less likely to know what to expect from the process.

Whilst the experiences of the first group were explored by the Adult Safeguarding team, Healthwatch focused on the second group: made up of the general public.

The questionnaires/ surveys were developed jointly between Healthwatch and the Adult Safeguarding Team. The questions were designed to test what was the general understanding of an adult at risk, and if the public had a clear understanding of how they would respond to it. We asked who people thought they should report an incident to and what would prevent them from doing so. We also asked what would make them feel more confident if they wanted to raise the alarm about a potentially abusive situation.

Respondents were approached at four different public events, which were unconnected to safeguarding issues. Participants were randomly approached and so were not self selecting, except where they declined to take part in the survey.

To enable participants to take part and share their views and experience, Healthwatch representatives explained to individuals that:

- Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham is about local people being able to influence the delivery, design, quality and standard of local health and social care services and one of the projects currently being looked at is protecting vulnerable adults and,
- participation is voluntary, and individuals are not required to answer any questions that they do not want to. Healthwatch representatives also explained that all the information collected would be

anonymised.

## SAFEGUARDING QUESTIONNAIRE

During our adult life we may find ourselves vulnerable through illness, frailty or old age, disability, mental illness, learning difficulties or dependency on others in some way. These situations may mean that others could take advantage of us. It has been known for vulnerable people to be physically and emotionally abused as well as financially exploited.

It is the responsibility of the Local Authority and Health Services to ensure they have measures in place to prevent abuse from happening or to deal with it effectively when it does. This can only work when we all take responsibility and speak up for those less able to do so for themselves.

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In order to know if the Local Authority is doing their part well enough, Healthwatch would like your views on the following:

1. Do you think you would recognise the signs of adult abuse?
2. Would you know who to contact if you thought that you or another adult was being abused?
3. Who might that be?
4. Is there enough information around to help the public to report incidents?
5. Do you feel confident enough to report an incident of possible abuse?
6. What sort of things might stop you asking for help when something is going wrong?
7. What would help to overcome the difficulties in passing on information about possible abuse?

8. If you can, please tell us about a time you passed on information about abuse or a bad situation for yourself or someone else and what happened as a result.
9. If there is an ongoing situation that you would like to share with someone now, please tell us about it here or speak to a member of Healthwatch staff today.
10. Please use the space for additional comments.

## RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION

### 1. Do you think you would recognise the signs of adult abuse?

56% of people who filled in the questionnaire were confident they would know how to recognise the signs of adult abuse. Some respondents gave more than one answer.

29% were not confident they would know how to recognise the signs of adult abuse.

	Numbers	%
Yes	83	56%
No	44	29%
Other answers (see below)	19	2%
Did not answer	3	13%
Bruising	7	
Crying	4	
Sometimes	4	
Sad/unhappy	2	
Looking scared	2	
Possibly	2	
Depends	2	
Not always	2	
Some of them	1	
Isolated	1	
Calling for help	1	
Scars	1	
Weight loss	1	

These are the most frequently made comments. The remainders are attached as Appendix I.

*'I would need to be around the person for a short period of time.'*

*'I could see the signs but you don't always know if it's abuse.'*

*'You wouldn't always know the financial situation.'*

*'Not sure because it can be hidden.'*

*'Only if there were marks on a person.'*

**2. Would you know who to contact if you thought that you or another adult was being abused?**

56% of people who filled in the questionnaire thought they knew who to contact if they themselves or another adult was being abused. 35% did not know who to contact.

	Numbers	%
Yes	83	56%
No	53	35%
Did not answer	6	4%
I am not sure	7	5%

These are the most frequently made comments. The remainders are attached as Appendix I.

'I think I would to the GP for more information, as he would know where I should go.'

'No but would ring social services.'

### 3. Who might that be?

Most people gave more than one answer.  
 45% of people said **the police** would be their first port of call to report abuse.  
 71% people had an answer about who they would report a case of possible abuse to. 29% did not answer.

	Numbers	%
Police	68	45%
Social Services	26	
Council	12	
999	9	
GP	7	
Family member	6	
Phone line	6	
111	4	
Friend	2	
Care Agency	2	
The Vibe	2	
Blank	2	
Citizen Advice Bureau	1	
Hospital	1	
Age Concern	1	
CLDT	1	
Gave an answer / TOTAL		71%
Did not answer	43	29%

#### 4. Is there enough information around to help the public to report incidents?

84% of respondents felt there is not enough information around to help the public to report incidents.  
9% felt there is enough information around to help the public to report incidents.

	Numbers	%
Yes	13	9%
No	126	84%
I don't know/I am not sure	7	5%
Did not answer	3	2%

These are the most frequently made comments. The remainders are attached as Appendix I.

*'I've never seen any information.'*

*'I have not seen any posters etc, not in the last year.'*

*'There is enough but only if you know where to look.'*

5. Do you feel confident enough to report an incident of possible abuse?

59% said they feel confident enough to report an incident of possible abuse. 32% feel they were not confident enough.

	Numbers	%
Yes	88	59%
No	48	32%
Not sure/Maybe	10	7%
Did not answer	3	2%

These are the most frequently made comments. The remainders are attached as Appendix I.

*'I would feel confident if I knew where to go and who to contact.'*

*'I don't feel confident because I don't know where to go.'*

*'I would feel confident to report an incident of possible abuse, but would like a way to report anonymously.'*

6. What sort of things might stop you asking for help when something is going wrong?

26% of respondents did not answer this question. The rest, 74%, had various ideas of what might stop them from helping when something is going wrong: 31% said fear of reprisal was the main reason that would stop them from asking for help.

	Numbers	%
Fear of reprisal/violence/being hurt themselves	46	31%
Various (see below)	38	26%
Family	12	8%
Lack of information (where to go/who to speak to)	7	5%
Abused person refusing help	4	3%
Nothing would stop me	4	3%
Did not answer	38	26%

These are the most frequently made comments. The remainders are attached as Appendix I.

*'Being hurt or bullied or my family being tormented'*

*'How it would affect my family'*

*'Lack of information on what will happen'*

*'Knowing where to go'*

*'The person being abused not wanting to tell'*

## 7. What would help to overcome the difficulties in passing on information about possible abuse?

27% of the respondents did not answer this question. The rest, 73%, had a wide variety of ideas as to what would help people overcome the difficulties in passing on information about possible abuse. These respondents often gave more than one answer. 26% of those who answered said that if they had more information about reporting abuse, they would be more likely to do so. 26% of people who answered said that not enough information about what to look out for as well as where and to whom they should report possible abuse would stop them from reporting it.

	Numbers	%
Did not answer	40	27%
Answered		73%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More information</li> <li>• Helpline/phone number</li> <li>• Confidentiality</li> <li>• More support (person to talk to/counseling)</li> <li>• More police</li> <li>• I don't know/I am not sure</li> <li>• Nothing</li> <li>• Family being taken care of</li> <li>• Confidence in the system</li> <li>• Being protected</li> <li>• Various others</li> </ul>	<p>31</p> <p>21</p> <p>14</p> <p>13</p> <p>9</p> <p>7</p> <p>6</p> <p>3</p> <p>3</p> <p>5</p> <p>9</p>	<p>26%</p> <p>18%</p> <p>11%</p> <p>10%</p> <p>7%</p> <p>6%</p> <p>5%</p> <p>3%</p> <p>3%</p> <p>4%</p> <p>7%</p>

These are the most frequently made comments. The remainders are attached as Appendix I.

*'Knowing who to call and what to look for and report.'*

*'A simple number like the 999 one that everyone can remember if needed.'*

*'That confidentiality is strictly observed at all times.'*

*'Places to go to speak to somebody.'*

8. If you can, please tell us about a time you passed on information about abuse or a bad situation for yourself or someone else and what happened as a result.

65% of respondents did not answer the question.  
19% said they had never had to report such an incident.  
16% gave brief accounts of an abusive or bad situation they came across.

	Numbers	%
Did not answer	97	65%
Not Applicable	28	19%
Gave an account (see below)	24	16%

These are the most frequently made comments. The remainders are attached as Appendix I.

*'Years ago I reported a domestic violence incident next door to me. Police came and woman would not press charges.'*

*'I reported concern to LSCB, social workers became involved, a team around the family meeting was help, plans put in place and relevant support provided to all concerned.'*

*'My friend was being abused by her husband who was dominating her life. I spoke to them and expressed how I felt. Nothing changed until social services were involved due to domestic violence towards children.'*

*'When I did this, the person who was being abused said it was not happening and the police could not do anything. The people involved then turned on me.'*

9. If there is an ongoing situation that you would like to share with someone now, please tell us about it here or speak to a member of Healthwatch staff today.

76% of respondents did not answer this question.  
23% gave a negative answer or said it was not applicable.  
2 people gave short accounts of a situation.

	Numbers	%
Did not answer	113	76%
No/Not Applicable	34	23%
Gave an account*	2	1%

\*The two accounts given to us under this section were dealt with appropriately.

10. Please use the space for additional comments.

81% of respondents did not answer this question.  
9% made various comments (see below).

	Numbers	%
Did not answer/ Not Applicable	121	81%
Various (see below + in the appendix)	28	9%

These are the most frequently made comments. The remainders are attached as Appendix I.

*'It's got much better than it was before and there is more information than there used to be.'*

*'More vital information about who to contact about abuse and neglect. Big visual posters and adverts.'*

*'People need to feel safe and they need to know there will be no-come back.'*

*'We need to see change: especially with the elderly and learning disability / getting hurt by their carers.'*

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In talking to members of the public for this survey it became clear that people do care about the abuse of vulnerable adults. The injustice of it and a keen dislike of it were often expressed.

Broadly speaking two thirds of respondents were confident they would recognise if an adult was either suffering abuse or at risk of abuse, whilst a third thought they might not recognise the signs.

Whilst a wide variety of answers was given for where the abuse might be reported, 40% of respondents did not know or were unsure of where they would report it to.

Two thirds of respondents said they felt confident to report an incident of possible abuse, and a third said they did not with the main reason being a fear of reprisals against themselves.

A large number of respondents (84%) felt there wasn't enough information around to help the public to report incidents.

In response to the results of this survey Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham recommends:

- That more information be made widely available to the general public about recognising the signs of different types of abuse,
- And that the information contains advice about where and to whom abuse should be reported. This could be posters in highly frequented public areas with eye catching pictures, very few words and a memorable phone number.
- To address the public's fears of possible reprisal it would be helpful if literature could contain a statement about confidentiality.

Respondents answered in a very wide variety of ways and we felt it was only fair to report most of their comments for each question when suitable.

**4. Is there enough information around to help the public to report incidents?**

*'I haven't seen anything but you see things on television.'*

*'There should be more literature.'*

*'There could be more.'*

*'There also needs to be things in easy read.'*

*'I've never seen any information, not even in any care home.'*

*'I have never seen anything in the last year.'*

*'I have not seen anything or I would know the signs and where to report the issue.'*

**5. Do you feel confident enough to report an incident of possible abuse?**

*'I would feel confident if I knew where to go.'*

*'I would feel confident if I knew where.'*

*'I don't feel confident because I don't know where to go.'*

*'I don't know where to go so how could I be confident?'*

*'How can I feel confident, I don't know who to go to or the process.'*

6. What sort of things might stop you asking for help when something is going wrong?

- 'Fear I will be abused myself'*
- 'Fear of the outcome of the whole situation'*
- 'If I was in danger myself'*
- 'Fear of the perpetrator'*
- 'Not being sure enough'*
- 'Not getting someone in trouble who is innocent'*
- 'Confidence in the system, would I be taken seriously'*
- 'Disabilities and language'*
- 'Embarrassment'*
- 'Being sworn to secrecy'*
- 'Privacy'*
- 'My information may be wrong'*
- 'Getting into trouble myself'*
- 'Not being believed'*
- 'It would be hard if it's a family member'*
- 'If the authorities don't do anything about it'*
- 'Nothing would stop me'*

7. What would help to overcome the difficulties in passing on information about possible abuse?

- 'More awareness: what is abuse, how to recognise it and when to report it.'*
- 'Higher profile by advertising in public.'*
- 'If I knew where to go I would be able to do it.'*
- 'Free call helpline.'*
- 'Direct line number, call centre staff trained to handle enquiry.'*
- 'That the information will be taken seriously and I will be told of what happens.'*
- 'To know that the vulnerable person will be listened to. To me this would be the most important thing. I would hate to see them depressed or down from an incident and them have a void in their life. The council would need*

*to give me reassurance that the person will be heard and their view taken very seriously.'*

*'Advocates if not already in place.'*

*'More people on organisation that take care of this stuff.'*

*'Being able to trust the person you are informing.'*

*'I would need to feel confident in the system and to know that they won't be separated from the person that is vulnerable if it's a parent, sibling etc.'*

*'Being taken seriously first of all - don't put it down to asc/mental condition etc.'*

*'Repercussions: not knowing what to do.'*

*'Safety that I won't get abused myself for reporting.'*

*'Expanding the number of venues where information is distributed.'*

*'More cctv cameras in places.'*

**8. If you can, please tell us about a time you passed on information about abuse or a bad situation for yourself or someone else and what happened as a result.**

*'I have reported a case of domestic violence case. Unaware of result but the police came.'*

*'My mother's carers were not seeing to her properly so I made a complaint and rang social services.'*

*'A gentleman had a stroke. He lived alone and was unable to look after himself. I contacted his local social services and he admitted to a care home until a family member was indentified to look after him.'*

*'I reported a care agency worker who was taking money from the purse of one of my ladies to the police/agency/council safeguarding team. The worker was put to work in office on her return from holiday. I feel she should have been dismissed. It is most stupid giving her access to other people's records etc.'*

*'A young person I used to work with was being neglected. I called social services and education services. They already knew about the YP and were keeping an eye on it. In the end the family moved away and I lost contact.'*

*'I reported someone for selling something very overpriced (door to door sales person) to my grandmother.'*

*'I made a social care referral regarding emotional and physical abuse and the family got support from social care.'*

*'999 and people were arrested.'*

*'Someone I know was being bullied so I told the teacher what was going on and the issue was resolved.'*

*'I saw a young boy being mugged. He was disabled and nobody helped him in Barking.'*

*'I had a friend of mine who was disabled and he used to be bullied and abused by other people. I reported it to my teacher.'*

*'I saw a boy (18+) pulling another disabled young boy's arm in Stratford. He was crying and shouting. A man tried to help but he was punched on the face.'*

*'My friend was bullied then he was hurt so I told the bully off and the problem was solved.'*

*'Never! I keep to myself because I do not want people to get into trouble and to have social workers involved. I don't like putting people in trouble as nothing will be done anyway if I report it. If I call the police they take too long and the abuser will be gone by the time they come'*

*'I have never reported anyone but I see carers on the phone while their clients are lonely for a long time.'*

**10. Please use the space for additional comments.**

*'More CCTVs / more police / when police you don't want to wait an hour for them to come.'*

*'I think more info on who to contact and where to go if you needs advice on abuse for yourself or others.'*

*'More information needs to be promoted within the borough.'*

*'People would contact the police about this, if they felt safe and had help after they contacted the police because it may be upsetting for them.'*

*'There should be someone there to help after.'*

*'The general public don't know where to go. More info should be made available and more done to ensure less people are put in this kind of vulnerable situation.'*

*'It's easy for all these organisations to say, report it or say something. But they have no idea when they separate family and friends. The impact on that individual who now may have no-one and the agencies then just disappear and leave the individual all by themselves.'*

*'There is not a lot of publicity about these things.'*

*'People need to be told that even when they are not sure it's better to highlight or bring the issue to the attention of the council because it could be something. Better that it's checked out, than people do nothing and it could be a bad result at the end.'*

*'I think that it needs to be clear that women who suffer from violence also are vulnerable and this is a safeguarding concern. A lot of people think it's only old people.'*

*'There needs to be information clear information for people to understand where to go.'*

*'There are loads of things that can be done to ensure people report issues, the first is that you need to ensure that there is enough publicity around the borough, the second is that there is confidence in the system.'*

*'Education / promotion are needed especially to family members.'*

*'If people don't know the signs then they would resort to anything. There is nothing round the borough.'*

*'I am lucky I am aware of these types of incidents so can do something about it but many individuals are not and are frightened and have none to be there for them to help.'*

*'Patient abuse in Chadwell Heath hospital. No action after being reported to hospital management.'*

*'Police to do their job / public to help each other / people are scared to help.'*

*'I wouldn't know who to call if an adult was being abused, other than the police.'*

*'I would worry about the report not being followed up and serious harm carrying to the adult.'*

*'Get small booklets and key holders with numbers and info for who to call / has to be young people friendly!'*

*'More leaflets through doors.'*