

Funding cut threatens one of the UK's longest-standing domestic abuse charities

Thursday 23 January, 2025

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KEY POINTS:

- Life-saving domestic abuse charity support centre and survivor services facing closure in Cheshire after almost 50 years of service
- Charity MyCWA (Cheshire Without Abuse) supported almost 4,000 vulnerable adults and children last year
- Cheshire East Council has confirmed there is no funding from April 2025 onwards
- MyCWA has launched an emergency appeal for funding to keep support centre and services open
- Closure threatens 24/7 crisis line that handled over 1,000 out of hours emergency calls last year
- Council's own report warns cutting funding would increase risks and strain public services

KEY QUOTES:

- Saskia Lightburn-Ritchie, Chief Executive MyCWA: "I can't quite articulate how catastrophic the impact of this funding decision is going to be. It will be felt for decades to come."
- Farah Nazeer, Chief Executive of Women's Aid: "Women's Aid stands in solidarity with MyCWA and urges the council to engage with us about this issue."
- Abi Blake, survivor: "This charity didn't just save my life - they gave me a future. Losing these services now, when so many need them, is unthinkable."

Cheshire, UK – Thursday 23rd January, 2025: One of Britain's longest-serving domestic abuse charities faces closure of its vital support centre and survivor services after nearly five decades of life-saving work, following confirmation that Cheshire East Council cannot fund its services beyond April 2025.

MyCWA's vital support centre in Crewe, Macclesfield community store and hub, and adult and child survivor support services operating across Cheshire East, face closure without urgent funding intervention; ending nearly 50 years of life-saving services for local families fleeing and recovering from abuse.

"For almost 50 years, people have fled abuse and we'd be there waiting for them. Not just to keep them and their children safe, but to help them heal and break the cycle of abuse," says Saskia Lightburn-Ritchie, Chief Executive MyCWA. "I can't quite articulate how catastrophic the impact of this funding decision is going to be. It will be felt for decades to come."

CRITICAL SERVICES AT RISK:

- 24/7 crisis helpline
- Emergency refuge accommodation for families and their pets
- Specialist trauma recovery programmes for children
- Survivor peer groups and specialist one-to-one support

FUNDING CHALLENGES

MyCWA had already faced significant funding reductions, with council support dropping from £850,000 in 2022-23 to £390,000 for the current year, and soon to be £0. "Despite increased demand for services each year, we're currently bridging the gap from our charity reserves to keep our refuge clients safe in our accommodation. However, this is an unsustainable situation, and we've clearly communicated this to the council," explains Lightburn-Ritchie.

SERVICE DELIVERY CONCERNS

Questions have emerged about future service provision. While the council has proposed moving services in-house, MyCWA highlights the critical nature of specialist support: "During the recent Christmas period, while council offices and in-house domestic abuse support were closed, our dedicated team supported 700 people in crisis," Lightburn-Ritchie reveals, "This is the difference specialist domestic abuse support

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makes. Domestic abuse doesn't wait for office hours."



COUNCIL'S OWN REPORT WARNS AGAINST FUNDING CUTS

MyCWA is one of several essential services included in Cheshire East Council's High-Level Business Case and Equality Impact Assessment (2023-27), which aims to identify cost savings across critical support areas - including domestic abuse services, short breaks for disabled children, mentoring for care leavers, and children's advocacy.

Regarding domestic abuse, the report states:

- "It would be difficult to justify ending the contract and leaving a gap in service provision. Whilst this would save the most going forward, the potential risk to the local community and the economic impact on other services would increase (i.e. Local Authorities, Police, Social Care, Health)."

- "Removing a specialist provider would be detrimental—losing expertise and people skillsets, when domestic abuse is more prevalent due to societal and economic pressures."

The report warns of significant consequences, including:

- "Young women and children will be at greater risk of domestic abuse due to a lack of a supportive network."

- "Potential increase in female homicides/suicide."

- "Increased pressure on other services – Children's Services, IDVAs, Police, Health, and Adult Social Care."

- "Reputational risk for the local authority – public perception of withdrawing a vital service."

- "Support for low-level/medium-risk domestic abuse cases will be significantly compromised."

The council also acknowledges the unique value of MyCWA, noting:

- "None of these [other providers] offer the holistic scale of service currently on offer to Cheshire East residents."

- MyCWA's staff includes individuals with lived experience (one-third of the workforce), which "helps with service improvement, offers greater client-empathy, and encourages service users to have their voice heard."

A NATIONAL EPIDEMIC

This crisis comes as domestic abuse cases surge nationally, with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimating that 2.3 million adults aged 16 years and over in England and Wales experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2023; an increase of 200,000 from the previous year.

MyCWA supported nearly 4,000 adults and children in Cheshire East alone last year, never turning away anyone in crisis. "When someone finds the courage to flee abuse, they often leave with nothing," Lightburn-Ritchie explains. "Our centre provides emergency food, clothing, and safety. These aren't just services - they're the difference between someone staying safe or returning to danger."

Farah Nazeer, Chief Executive of Women's Aid, said: "At Women's Aid, we are deeply concerned about the decommissioning of the MyCWA service by Cheshire East Council. To our knowledge, MyCWA is the only commissioned domestic abuse refuge in the area, which means that if closure goes ahead, the council will be undermining its legal duty, outlined in the Domestic Abuse Act (2021), to provide refuge accommodation to survivors."

"As a member of the Women's Aid Federation, we have reached out to the council to discuss the closure of MyCWA but we are yet to hear back about a meeting to deal with this urgent matter. There has been no communication about any future potential plans to deliver another service, meaning that survivors will be left without access to the support they need. Women's Aid stands in solidarity with MyCWA and urges the council to engage with us about this issue."

Survivor Abi Blake, who received life-saving support from MyCWA after suffering critical injuries from her abusive husband, emphasises the stakes: "This charity didn't just save my life - they gave me a

future. They gave me and my sons hope. Losing these services now, when so many need them, is unthinkable."

"Our centre and services are the difference between life and death for many," Lightburn-Ritchie concludes. "Without specialist community-based intervention, we face preventable tragedies."

Those wishing to support MyCWA's emergency appeal can donate at:

www.justgiving.com/campaign/savemycwa

[ENDS]

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