Night Safety

Women’s Safety Audit
Victoria



NTES

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Purpose

Westminster City Council and Victoria BID commissioned Night Time Economy Solutions to conduct a comprehensive overnight assessment of women's safety during the evening and nighttime economy hours.

This report presents the findings of an overnight audit conducted in Victoria. The district's vibrant nightlife, which includes world-famous West End theatres, bars, and restaurants, offers a distinctive experience for residents and visitors alike. This audit provides a detailed examination of various aspects influencing the safety of women and girls during the night in Victoria, shedding light on both the positive aspects and challenges that define the area's nighttime economy. The findings of this audit aim to create a comprehensive understanding of the safety considerations for women and girls in Victoria.

This report provides actionable recommendations for all stakeholders involved, outlining strategies to enhance the safety and wellbeing of women in Westminster during nighttime activities.

Aims

01 Assess the safety of women and girls. Undertake a thorough evaluation of women and girls' safety within Westminster's nighttime activities, encompassing the viewpoints of visitors, employees, and residents.

02 Comprehend women's experiences. Acquire insights into the experiences and perspectives of women and girls in the area, particularly regarding their interactions within Westminster's nighttime scene.

03 Identify crucial safety concerns. Highlight specific safety issues confronted by women, including both physical locations and social interactions within Westminster's nighttime activities.

04 Offer targeted recommendations. Present practical recommendations and strategies for all relevant parties, delineating actionable steps to enhance the safety and wellbeing of women and girls in Victoria.

05 Promote ongoing enhancement. Establish a framework for continuous improvement, allowing for the tracking and assessment of implemented measures, focusing on long-term safety improvements for women and girls in the community.

Audit Findings

An overnight audit was performed as part of the Westminster work initiative in Victoria commissioned by Westminster City Council and Victoria BID. This took place on Saturday, 20th May 2023.

This audit involved a comprehensive examination of various facets of the evening and nighttime economy, aiming to assess the impact of these factors on the experience of women's safety during nighttime activities.

The overnight audit revealed a distinct disparity in the levels of venue governance. This inconsistency in how businesses and hospitality venues manage their operations during the night has significant implications for patrons' overall safety and security.

The varying levels of venue governance could be indicative of the effectiveness of safety measures currently in place. Some establishments demonstrated more robust protocols and well-trained staff dedicated to ensuring the wellbeing of their customers. However, on the opposite end of the spectrum, there were venues where governance appeared disorganised, and safety measures were either inadequately enforced or underemphasised.

This contrast became particularly apparent when addressing concerns such as outdoor venues and crowd management, patron dispersal, and glasses and bottles being taken outdoors. It is worth remarking that the presence of inactive workers, including security door staff and venue staff, could exacerbate these issues. This inactivity may stem from a lack of proper training in handling various situations, further highlighting the importance of comprehensive staff education and training to maintain safety and security in nightlife establishments.

The effectiveness of safety measures in Victoria’s establishments is heavily dependent on the knowledge and skills of the staff responsible for maintaining order and ensuring the well-being of patrons. Training to help ensure and maintain venue governance should be better recorded and instilled as a standard practice. This means that all personnel working in nightlife venues should receive comprehensive training to handle various situations, especially during nighttime hours.

Businesses, safety initiatives (such as Soho Pubwatch and Super Pubwatch), and local authorities should work in unison to set and enforce a standard for venue governance. This collaboration can lead to a safer and more enjoyable nightlife experience for all patrons, irrespective of the type of establishment they choose to visit. An issue that came to light is the challenge of effectively engaging businesses in these endeavours, underscoring the pressing need for more streamlined communication and collaboration amongst all stakeholders to ensure optimal safety protocols are in place.

Audit Findings

The prevalence of homelessness in various public areas raises immediate safety concerns, particularly for women and girls. Interventions such as outreach programmes, addiction support services, and urban planning strategies are imperative to transform these areas into more secure and welcoming spaces. Addressing these issues directly impacts consumers and helps ensure the navigation of public spaces without feeling vulnerable or at risk.

The challenges associated with homelessness and its related issues appear to have been exacerbated by several factors. Council efforts to coordinate soup kitchens with multiple charities have encountered obstacles, with some charities declining to participate and others open to cooperating effectively. Mediation between charities to streamline services and support for those in need is a crucial factor in evolving the efficiency and effectiveness of this service.

Furthermore, while offering assistance, charities also face limitations in their approaches. The provision of tents to individuals experiencing homelessness can, unfortunately, contribute to the likelihood of maintaining a street-based lifestyle. This situation has, tragically, resulted in deaths and sexual assaults among those affected. In some instances, sex work has even occurred within the tents, compounding the safety concerns.

One significant gap in addressing homelessness and its related issues is the absence of public safety officers (PSOs) specifically dedicated to homelessness concerns. Existing bylaws are unable to address these challenges effectively, and there is a reluctance to employ PSOs due to limitations on enforcement powers. As an alternative, community notices could be considered as a means of monitoring and regulating activities, ensuring those who need support are helped while those involved in harmful or illegal activities are appropriately addressed.

Improving the public realm is important to address a range of safety and vibrancy concerns. These enhancements serve as the cornerstone for crafting a more inviting and inclusive environment during the evening and at night.

The audit has highlighted a distinct lack of vibrancy in the area, particularly at night when it can feel somewhat sterile. Contributing factors include the absence of diverse activities, limited walking routes, and persisting public realm issues. Creating appealing spaces and well-lit walkways plays a pivotal role in transforming Victoria into a lively and thriving hub.

A critical facet of this transformation involves the underutilisation of lighting. Many areas of Victoria, including Christchurch Gardens, lack sufficient lighting at night, potentially compromising safety. Implementing strategic improvements in lighting infrastructure, complemented by periodic patrols, can enhance safety. This, in turn, fosters a more inclusive atmosphere, ensuring that individuals of all genders feel at ease and secure during their nocturnal visits. It is worth highlighting that dimly lit areas like Lower Robert Street offer opportunities for enhancement, particularly as pedestrians frequently use car parks as shortcuts to the Embankment. Rejuvenating these locations by incorporating improved and/or creative lighting bolsters safety and contributes to a more animated and inviting ambience.

Regarding the specific concerns in King’s Scholar’s Passage, it's evident that this area is a hotspot for nighttime criminal activities, characterised by open gates, drug dealing and drug use. There is a reliance on private security contractors and CCTV-specific lighting to improve safety; however, even then, this is only on one side of the road.

Audit Findings

A potential resolution may involve establishing a service agreement with the CCTV housing solution centre and nearby hostels. Encouraging residents to report crimes, addressing the issue of rubbish, and installing secure gates are imperative steps. Furthermore, developing a design proposal for the street which aligns with the broader public realm improvements is essential. This undertaking requires securing initial funding and exploring avenues for continuous financial support. Managing the CCTV infrastructure will also necessitate a dedicated controller.

Additionally, the audit highlighted issues regarding waste collection services and the service provider for most (if not all) West End theatres. Ideally, waste bins should undergo daily collection, but it appears bins are often left unattended, and waste is only taken outside as needed. It was noted that efforts are underway to transition to a different service provider through potential incentives such as offering discounted services.

According to The Railway Data Centre, in 2021/2022, London Victoria Station recorded 36,776,338 entries and exits, making it the second most utilised station in Great Britain. However, despite the high footfall, Victoria remains primarily a commercialised area, with an obvious absence of compelling incentives for both consumers and tourists to extend their stay in the district once their immediate tasks or activities are complete.

To unlock the full potential of Victoria as a vibrant and thriving hub, there is a pressing need to diversify the range of activities and services available throughout the early evening and night. The presence of numerous vacant shops in Victoria poses a challenge since many of these properties are privately owned, making it more complex to repurpose them for community and cultural use. Furthermore, the commercial landscape in Victoria appears to be dominated by larger businesses, with a shortage of independent establishments that could infuse diversity into the area's character and offerings.

For the most part, Victoria functions as a business district, catering primarily to tourists and serving as a thoroughfare for commuters rather than a destination. This trend reflects the need for a strategic shift to reposition Victoria as a sought-after locale for leisure and entertainment. However, it's important to note that Victoria boasts numerous heritage elements, such as the Strutton Ground food market, which enrich its cultural tapestry. Yet, these destinations remain underappreciated and underutilised, suggesting a need for more effective promotion and visibility to tap into their potential to enhance Victoria’s overall charm and appeal.

Recommendations	Importance	Timescale	Cost
Establish clear communication and collaboration channels between local authorities, Soho Pubwatch, and Super Pubwatch. This will enable the development and implementation of effective safety protocols tailored to nightlife settings. This should include: • Holding regular stakeholder meetings for open communication. • Defining efficient communication methods and incident reporting procedures. • Creating a joint safety protocol framework for nightlife venues. • Providing training on protocol implementation, conflict resolution, and emergency response. • Implementing a standardised incident reporting system. • Conducting routine safety audits and providing feedback. • Exploring technology solutions for enhanced safety monitoring. • Forming a joint task force for oversight and coordination. • Promoting best practices and success stories. • Periodically reviewing and adapting safety protocols.	High	Ongoing	£
Work with McDonald's to strengthen their security, with a focus on outdoor areas, and provide specialised women's safety training for the safety of female patrons. This should include: • Enhanced security measures, especially in outdoor spaces, to deter potential threats. • Develop and deliver Women's Safety and Personal Safety training modules tailored for night time staff to ensure a secure environment.	Medium	Medium	£
Combat drug use and homelessness in the Piazza area through a threefold approach: • Continue and strengthen collaboration with outreach organisations to engage those experiencing homelessness. • Develop and promote existing drug and alcohol wellbeing services. • Implement urban planning strategies to deter drug-related activities.	High	Long	£££
Address homelessness on Victoria Street, particularly in the underground area, through comprehensive urban renewal and strategic business development efforts. This can be done through the implementation of revitalisation projects to transform public spaces. Work with businesses to encourage them to contribute positively to the area's vibrancy and discourage loitering.	High	Long	££
Enhance safety at Christchurch Gardens, especially during nighttime, by improving lighting and implementing occasional patrols. This should include: • The upgrade and installation ofadequate lighting to ensure visibility and safety in all areas of the park. • Schedule periodic patrols by security personnel to monitor and maintain a safe environment for park visitors.	High	Short	£

Recommendations	Importance	Timescale	Cost
Promote consumer and tourist engagement in Victoria by curating an array of evening activities and diversifying service offerings. This should aim to encourage extended stays, leading to increased economic spending. This should include: • Organisation and promotion of a diverse selection of engaging evening events and activities. • Collaboration with local businesses to broaden their service offerings, addressing a wider range of consumer interests and needs. This can be achieved through business diversification training to identify opportunities for development and implementation of multi-purpose services	High	Ongoing	£
Implement community policing initiatives to strengthen the rapport between law enforcement and local residents, ultimately enhancing safety perceptions within the community. This should include: • Organisation of workshops focused on safety practices, crime prevention, and emergency responses, involving both law enforcement and community members. • Further development of programmes that involve local youth in positive activities, such as sports events, mentoring, and skill-building, to strengthen their relationship with law enforcement. • Supporting the formation of neighbourhood watch groups, facilitating collective efforts in maintaining safety. • Implementation of a structured feedback system for residents to provide input on community policing efforts, ensuring responsiveness to evolving needs.	Medium	Long	££
Create safe zones or designated areas to provide essential services and support for vulnerable populations, including those experiencing homelessness.. This should include: • A needs assessment to identify the specific needs and preferences of the vulnerable populations in question. • Designated and specific areas equipped with essential services such as shelter, food, hygiene facilities, and access to medical care. • Partnerships with local support organisations and NGOs to ensure comprehensive and tailored assistance is readily available. • Implementation of measures to ensure the safety and security of both service providers and recipients within these designated areas. Information about these safe zones should be readily available and accessible to the vulnerable populations, as well as to service providers. The effectiveness of the safe zones should be regularly assessed and and adjusted based on feedback and changing circumstances.	High	Medium	£
Improve CCTV coverage in high-traffic areas and hotspots to deter criminal activity and furnish critical evidence for investigations. This can be achieved by: • Identifying high-traffic areas and crime hotspots that require enhanced CCTV coverage. Develop a comprehensive plan for camera placement and coverage. • Installing new CCTV cameras in identified areas and upgrade existing ones to ensure optimal functionality and coverage. • Establishing integration between CCTV systems and law enforcement agencies for swift response in cases of suspicious activity. • Launching a public awareness campaign: inform the public about the presence of CCTV cameras as a deterrent to criminal activities, contributing to a safer environment.	High	Long	£££

Recommendations	Importance	Timescale	Cost
Launch a gender-sensitive public awareness campaign to educate the community, with a focus on women and girls' safety, promoting safe practices and reporting procedures.. This should include: • A targeted awareness campaign addressing safety concerns specific to women and girls disseminated through various communication channels to ensure wide-reaching awareness, including social media, local events, and community partnerships. • Collaboration with schools and colleges to integrate safety education modules into their curriculum. • The delivery of workshops and training courses to provide practical knowledge on safe practices and reporting procedures.	High	Medium	£
Encourage local businesses and establishments to actively participate in safety initiatives, which should include comprehensive employee training on handling safety concerns and emergency situations. • Develop tailored training modules addressing safety concerns and emergency response for employees. • Reach out to local businesses and establishments to promote their involvement in safety initiatives. • Encouorage business to organise periodic safety drills to ensure employees are well prepared to handle various situations. • Set up clear channels of communication for businesses to report safety concerns.	High	Short	£
Cultivate partnerships with nonprofit organisations and NGOs specialising in women's safety. Leverage their expertise and resources to implement targeted interventions. You should: • Identify the specific expertise and resources required from nonprofit organisations and NGOs. • Establish partnerships through mutual agreements, outlining roles, responsibilities, and expected outcomes. • Allocate necessary resources, such as funding, personnel, and equipment, to support interventions. • Conduct periodic assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions and make necessary adjustments. • Implement a system for ongoing communication, feedback, and reporting between the partners	High	Short	£
Regularly conduct audits and assessments of safety measures and protocols to ensure continuous compliance and identify areas for improvement. • Set a regular schedule for safety audits and assessments to ensure consistency. • Conduct thorough assessments of existing safety measures, protocols, and their effectiveness. • Identify any areas where safety measures may not be fully compliant with established protocols. • Take proactive steps to rectify any identified gaps or weaknesses in the safety measures and protocols. • Document the findings of the audits and provide clear recommendations for improvements.	High	Ongoing	£
Create and disseminate a nighttime safety guide specifically tailored for women and girls. This guide should offer vital information on safe routes, emergency contacts, and available support services. To achieve this, the following steps should be considered: • Create comprehensive content for the nighttime safety guide, including safe routes, emergency contacts, and available support services. • Design the guide for easy readability and accessibility. Print an adequate number of copies for distribution. • Establish channels for widespread distribution, including local community centres, schools, and public spaces. • Collaborate with schools and colleges to ensure the guide is readily available to students. • Make the guide available online for easy digital access. • Regularly review and update the guide to ensure the information remains current and accurate.	High	Short	£

Recommendations	Importance	Timescale	Cost
Collaborate with local educational institutions to implement safety education programmes for students. These programmes should primarily include behavioural change initiatives to help ensure early intervention. To achieve this, the following steps should be considered: • Identify the specific safety and behavioural change education needs and concerns of students in collaboration with educational institutions. • Work with educators to integrate safety and behavioural change education modules into the curriculum, ensuring age-appropriate content. • Provide training and resources to educators to effectively deliver educational programmes. • Conduct engaging workshops and activities to reinforce safety knowledge and skills, as well as male behavioural change workshops. • Establish mechanisms to collect feedback from students and educators, and use it to refine education programmes. • Encourage parents and community members to actively participate in education initiatives.	High	Medium	£
Establish a 24/7 helpline or reporting system dedicated to providing immediate assistance and reporting of safety concerns for women and girls in emergency situations. To achieve this, the following steps should be considered: • Establish and operate a dedicated helpline or reporting system with round-the-clock availability. ◦ Operators to handle emergency situations with sensitivity and efficiency, ensuring appropriate response protocols are followed. • Alternatively, identify and app or mobile reporting tool to act as the dedicated helpine or reporting system. • Launch a public awareness campaign to inform the community about the helpline or reporting system and how to use it. • Collaborate closely with law enforcement agencies to ensure coordination in response to emergency calls. • Establish mechanisms for users to provide feedback on the helpline or reporting system, using it to make necessary improvements.	High	Medium	££

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Westminster City Council



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City of Westminster