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Title: Consultation Response – Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2021-2024

#### **Executive Summary**

On 3 June 2020, the Police and Crime Committee noted the following standing delegation, which was agreed by the London Assembly at its Annual Meeting on 1 May 2013:

That authority be delegated to Chairs of all ordinary committees and sub-committees to respond on the relevant committee or sub-committee's behalf, following consultation with the lead Members of the party Groups on the committee or sub-committee, where it is consulted on issues by organisations and there is insufficient time to consider the consultation at a committee meeting.

Following consultation with party Group Lead Members, the Chair of the Police and Crime Committee sent a response to the Home Office's call for evidence on the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2021-2024, as attached at **Appendix 1**.

### Decision

That the Chair, in consultation with party Group Lead Members, agrees the response to the Home Office's call for evidence on the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2021-2024, as attached at **Appendix 1**.

#### **Assembly Member**

I confirm that I do not have any disclosable pecuniary interests in the proposed decision and take the decision in compliance with the Code of Conduct for elected Members of the Authority.

The above request has my approval.

Signature

11Desai

Date 26/03/2021

**Printed Name** Unmesh Desai AM, Chair of the Police and Crime Committee

# Decision by an Assembly Member under Delegated Authority

Notes:

1. The Lead Officer should prepare this form for signature by relevant Members of the Assembly to record any instance where the Member proposes to take action under a specific delegated authority. The purpose of the form is to record the advice received from officers, and the decision made.

2. The 'background' section (below) should be used to include an indication as to whether the information contained in / referred to in this Form should be considered as exempt under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoIA), or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR). If so, the specimen Annexe (attached below) should be used. If this form does deal with exempt information, you must submit both parts of this form for approval together.

#### Background and proposed next steps:

On 3 June 2020, the Police and Crime Committee noted the following standing delegation, which was agreed by the London Assembly at its Annual Meeting on 1 May 2013:

That authority be delegated to Chairs of all ordinary committees and sub-committees to respond on the relevant committee or sub-committee's behalf, following consultation with the lead Members of the party Groups on the committee or sub-committee, where it is consulted on issues by organisations and there is insufficient time to consider the consultation at a committee meeting.

Following consultation with party Group Lead Members, the Chair of the Police and Crime Committee sent a response to the Home Office's call for evidence on the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2021-2024, as attached at **Appendix 1**.

| Confirmation that appropriate delegated authority exists for this decision |               |      |            |  |
|--|---------------|------|------------|--|
| Signed by Committee<br>Services  | Lauren Harvey | Date | 24/03/2021 |  |
| Print Name: Lauren Harve   | y             | Tel: | x4383      |  |
| Financial implications<br>NOT REQUIRED                                     |               |      |            |  |
| Signed by Finance  | N/A           | Date |            |  |
| Print Name   | N/A           | Tel: |            |  |

| Legal implications   |                                 |      |            |  |  |
|--|---------------------------------|------|------------|--|--|
| The Chair of the Police and Crime Committee has the power to make the decision set out in this report. |                                 |      |            |  |  |
| Signed by Legal  | Strain                          | Date | 24/03/2021 |  |  |
| Print Name   | Emma Strain, Monitoring Officer | Tel: | X 4399     |  |  |

Additional information should be provided supported by background papers. These could include for example the business case, a project report or the results of procurement evaluation.

### Supporting detail/List of Consultees:

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chairman), Sian Berry AM, Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM, and Peter Whittle AM.

## Public Access to Information

Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the FoIA, or the EIR and will be made available on the GLA Website within one working day of approval.

If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision (for example, to complete a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary. **Note:** this form (Part 1) will either be published within one working day after it has been approved or on the defer date.

## Part 1 – Deferral Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? No

Until what date: (a date is required if deferring)

### Part 2 – Sensitive information

Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under FoIA or EIR should be included in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

Is there a part 2 form - No

#### Lead Officer/Author

Signed

Janette Roker

Janette Roker

Date: 24/03/2021

Tel: x6562

Print Name

Job Title Senior Policy Adviser

| Countersigned by | ELillicar | Date:    |
|------------------|-----------|----------|
| Director         |           | 24.03.21 |

Print Name

Ed Williams

Tel: x4399

# **LONDON**ASSEMBLY

Appendix 1 City Hall The Queen's Walk More London London SE1 2AA Tel: 020 7983 4000 www.london.gov.uk



Unmesh Desai AM Chair of the Police and Crime Committee

## Violence against Women and Girls Strategy: call for evidence Home Office

Interpersonal Abuse Unit Violence Against Women and Girls Team 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, Fry Building 2 Marsham Street London SW1P 4DF

(Sent by email)

26 March 2021

## Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy 2021 to 2024: call for evidence

The London Assembly Police and Crime Committee welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Government's Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2021 to 2024: call for evidence.

The London Assembly is responsible for examining Mayoral decisions and actions to ensure that the Mayor of London's promises to London are delivered. The Assembly's Police and Crime Committee examines the work of the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC), as well as regularly questioning the Metropolitan Police Service (the Met).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See: London Assembly Police and Crime Committee

The Committee has had a long-standing interest in, and has thoroughly investigated, violence against women and girls (VAWG) in London, which will form the basis of this response. In 2020, the Committee released a report following its investigation on domestic abuse; a crime which makes up nearly 10 per cent of the offences recorded by the Met each year.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, the Committee published a report on VAWG in 2016. This highlighted the underreporting of harmful practices, the pressure on women's refuges and support services and the lack of proper investment to support victims and survivors.<sup>3</sup> The Committee has also carried out investigations into rape, sexual violence<sup>4</sup> and harmful practices, including female genital mutilation (FGM).<sup>5</sup>

While the Committee understands that the Government will be addressing domestic abuse in a further complementary strategy later in the year, the Committee advocates the need for a joined-up VAWG strategy that responds to all crimes against women and girls. The Committee therefore asks that the Government delivers an integrated strategy that tackles all forms of VAWG.

## Misogyny

Misogyny, and the behaviours that manifest from it, is fundamental to the culture in which VAWG takes place. The Committee welcomes that, following Government approval, police in England and Wales are set to record misogyny as a hate crime on an experimental basis from this autumn. The Government should review the effectiveness of this change and base any decision on whether improved outcomes are seen for women and girls. Giving evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee on 'Hate Crime and Its Violent Consequences' (March 2017), Sarah Newton, the then parliamentary under-secretary of state for vulnerability, safeguarding and counter-terrorism, reported that Nottinghamshire police's policy of reporting misogyny as a hate crime had: *"opened up conversations about conscious and unconscious bias. It really improved the police force's understanding and made the community a lot more confident about coming forward. They had many more women coming forward to report all sorts of crimes."*<sup>6</sup> Recording misogyny as a hate crime should be seen as a positive move forwards that supports the police in their work. In creating conversations about what constitutes misogyny it will open up discussion and challenge unconscious biases. In better identifying crimes, police will be able to signpost victims and survivors to more effective support.

## Volume

Tackling VAWG is an important issue for London. In 2018/19, five out of six victims of sexual assault in London did not report the crime to the police.<sup>7</sup> Of the 20,482 sexual offences recorded in the same period, 87 per cent of the victims were female.<sup>8</sup> From February 2020 to January 2021, the Met reported an additional 11,696 incidents of domestic abuse during the pandemic, up 8.1 per cent on the same period the previous year,<sup>9</sup> with the biggest threats being found amongst couples forced to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Police and Crime Committee, <u>Domestic abuse</u>, April 2020

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Police and Crime Committee, <u>Violence against women and girls</u>, November 2016

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Police and Crime Committee, <u>Sexual offences double</u>, November 2019

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> London Assembly, <u>Tackling FGM in London</u>, April 2017

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Transcript of Home Affairs Select, <u>Community Oral Evidence, Hate Crime and its Violent Consequences, March 2017</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Evening Standard, Evening Standard Comment: We must end violence against women, 15 March 2021

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime Tackling VAWG

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> MOPAC, report to the Police and Crime Committee, 5 March 2021

lock down in the same house.<sup>10</sup> In December 2020, the Committee wrote to the Met Commissioner, Dame Cressida Dick QPM, warning that increased time living with perpetrators within the home could exacerbate the worrying trends that had been seen in the first lockdown.<sup>11</sup>

Prior to COVID-19, London was grappling with an alarming rise in the number of recorded rape and sexual offences, with the number of offences recorded in 2019 nearly double that of eight years ago. Although the total number of sexual violence crimes in London decreased in 2019/20, there were more than 18,000 sexual crime related incidents reported in the 12 months to February 2021.<sup>12</sup> This includes 7,172 rapes. The Committee recognises the significant implications this has for the response of the police, the wider criminal justice system and specialist VAWG support services.

During the Committee's investigation on domestic abuse we found that, from 2011 to 2019, London saw a vast increase in domestic abuse offences, from 46,000 in 2011 to 89,000 in 2019.<sup>13</sup> The investigation also found that forms of domestic abuse had widened, with an increase in emotional and financial abuse, as well as repeat victimisation.<sup>14</sup>

Domestic abuse is often a crime that comes with multiple follow-on issues. In October 2019, the Committee heard from a London-based charity that at least a third of the women they worked with reported stalking or harassment when seeking support for domestic abuse. At least one in ten victims visiting the same charity reported sexual violence, with coercive control present in most reported incidents. As stated above, the Government must therefore ensure that its VAWG strategy encompasses all forms of VAWG.

The Committee understands that, in London, FGM remains a cause for concern. The number of FGM cases being referred to the NHS have dropped, but it has been reported that the drop could be due to difficulty accessing services during the pandemic.<sup>15</sup> Despite the decrease, the numbers are still concerning; between July and September 2020, 635 new cases of FGM were recorded compared to 940 the previous year, a 32 per cent decrease and between October and December 2020, 685 new cases were recorded compared to 900 in the same period in 2019, a 24 per cent decrease.<sup>16</sup>

## Impact

All victims of VAWG must have equal access to protection and support, including Black and minority ethic women, migrant women, LGBT+ and disabled women. In 2019, the Committee heard how important it is for survivors to have access to quick and effective services, as well as the availability of a quality criminal justice response. The Committee learnt that some officers working in the Met's safeguarding teams lacked the experience to deal with sexual offences and rape. In addition, Rape Crisis Centre representatives told the Committee that they would like to see police officers improve communication with survivors, including showing them more dignity and respect and not treating them as 'one of many'. This is a serious concern.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> The Standard, <u>Domestic violence pushes this year's London killings over 100</u> 12 October 2020

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Police and Crime Committee, <u>Letter to the Met Police on expected rise in domestic abuse in December</u>, December 2020

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> The Standard, <u>One in twenty rape cases lead to police charge</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Metropolitan Police website, Hate Crime and Special Crime Dashboard

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Data provided to the Committee by the Metropolitan Police, October 2019

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> The Guardian, Number of new FGM cases referred to NHS in England down by a quarter, 25 February 2021

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> The Guardian, Number of new FGM cases referred to NHS in England down by a quarter, 25 February 2021

Communication between police officers and victims also requires attention; the Committee heard that after a crime report had been filed, there can often be a six-month delay for survivors to receive any form of communication from the police. The investigation also found that officers within the Met's safeguarding units were 'overwhelmed' by the number of domestic abuse cases they are expected to deal with.<sup>17</sup> As a result there was a perception among domestic abuse services that the Met sometimes struggles with its response to domestic abuse as other pressing issues, such as terrorism, public order or knife crime, overtake domestic abuse as a priority.<sup>18</sup>

In March 2021, the Committee met with the Deputy Commissioner of the Met.<sup>19</sup> He spoke about the importance of an understanding of domestic abuse within the police service but admitted that there are areas of follow-up where the Met is not as strong as it needs to be. The Government must ensure all police forces have a thorough understanding of the nature of VAWG, the importance of the right response and provide adequate support to survivors.

## Impact of COVID-19

Lockdown measures have left victims of VAWG, particularly victims of domestic abuse, more vulnerable and isolated. During the first lockdown in 2020, there was a 65 per cent increase in calls to the national domestic abuse hotline and it is expected that demand will continue to increase as lockdown is eased and more women and children seek help.<sup>20</sup>

COVID-19 has also increased the complexity of tackling VAWG. For example, those who experience abuse in the home have had to endure more violence because of the restrictions on movement and the reduced availability of support services during the first lockdown. At a time when more face-to-face consultations have been needed, the Committee is interested to hear what the Government will do to ensure that these services continue to provide support regardless of the pandemic.

With the return of the night-time economy, the Committee is concerned that sexual offences and VAWG may start to climb again, partly due to the known association between drinking alcohol and physical and severe physical domestic violence.<sup>21</sup> It is imperative that the Government puts in place sufficient plans so that VAWG does not rise to pre-pandemic levels.

Furthermore, there has been a 42 per cent fall in the number of prosecutions in London relating to domestic abuse, with only one in twenty rape allegations in London leading to a suspect being charged.<sup>22</sup> Action must be taken to address this.

The messaging around the #MeToo movement has seen more victims of VAWG come forward; in 2019 Advance, a London-based charity, informed the Committee that demand increased by 25 per cent which put the organisation under increased pressure at a time when funding was also being reduced. This often means that women are seen for shorter periods via a short-term approach when a long-term solution is needed.

Other domestic abuse support organisations have had to turn women down for refuge spaces because of the huge increase in demand during the pandemic. Solace Women's Aid, based in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Informal meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 19 June 2019

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Police and Crime Committee, <u>Domestic abuse</u>, April 2020

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 17 March 2021

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> The Independent, <u>Government announces £19m in Budget to tackle domestic abuse</u>, 3 March 2021

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Alcohol Concern, <u>Grasping the nettle: alcohol and domestic violence</u>, August 2010

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> The Standard, Number of rapes in London rises but only one in 20 cases leads to police charge, 16 March 2021

London, experienced a 53 per cent increase in referrals from January 2020 to January 2021, but reported being unable to handle 700 calls for help because of a lack of resources.<sup>23</sup> Once lockdown is lifted, it is likely that more victims may want to access and use these services, as well as seek refuge. However, with a lack of funding there is a fear that many services will have to turn victims away simply because they do not have the resources.

## Recommendations

The Government must ensure equal access to support services and protection for all victims and survivors of VAWG.

The Government should increase resources for support services, making spaces COVID-19 compliant and providing more safe spaces for victims of VAWG.

The Government must set out in its VAWG strategy how it will provide adequate funding for the specialist VAWG sector to ensure all victims are able to access support and protection.

The Government must work with police forces to ensure officers and specialist units have adequate training to support the victims and survivors of VAWG.

## Prevention

Greater focus on the prevention of VAWG is needed. The Police and Crime Committee fully supports a strategy that promotes partnership and multi-agency working; leads to improved understanding of the prevalence of VAWG; has a greater portfolio of services to protect and support victims; and has enhanced mechanisms to tackle and successfully prosecute perpetrators within acceptable time frames. This must include a firm commitment to embedding prevention and early intervention, including work with perpetrators to tackle and prevent VAWG in the long term.

The Committee welcomes the commitment by the Home Office to work with the National Police Chiefs' Council lead on domestic abuse and the College of Policing to develop national guidance for police forces on serial and repeat perpetrators.

## Recommendations

The Government should ensure a firm commitment to the promotion of partnership and multiagency working in its VAWG Strategy.

The Government must make clear the support it will give to the police, health, social care and education services, voluntary organisations, communities and, most of all, the service providers to help with the increasing demand and rising cases of VAWG to support victims and stop reoffending.

The Government's strategy must ensure prevention and early intervention is embedded in its strategy, including work with perpetrators.

## Justice

Justice for all victims and survivors of VAWG must be ensured.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> BBC News, <u>Domestic abuse: Refuges turn down women as demand for places soars</u> 19March 2021

The Met has said that the increase in sexual offences and the demand on officers "has been compounded by an exponential growth in digital evidence (such as text messages) for each individual case".<sup>7</sup> We heard that this "is going to be a continuing demand and a continuing pressure", and as such, is one that will require scrutiny and effective future planning.<sup>24</sup>

The Committee has previously written to the Secretary of State for Justice urging action to tackle the growing backlog of cases in the courts; it is known that time delays add pressure to victims and witnesses and raise the case attrition rate.<sup>25</sup> The Committee understands the difficulties and delays that COVID-19 has caused, however, the country is now adapting to a new normal and that must include the criminal justice system.

The Committee is concerned by the capacity of the courts and the numbers of cases dropping out of the system. As part of its committeement to tackling VAWG, the Committee met the Met, Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), MOPAC and the Victims Commissioner for London to understand the impact of rape and sexual offences in the capital.<sup>26</sup> The Committee heard how there has been an increase in the time taken for cases to be charged by the police and CPS, and that rape prosecutions have fallen to their lowest level since records began, despite rising reports of rape. In addition, the average time for a report of rape to be charged is the longest of any crime type.<sup>27</sup> This is a concern.

The Committee understands that when victims have proper support to keep them engaged in the criminal justice system, they are much more likely to be supported into court and enabled to give evidence. Waiting years for justice can be difficult and stressful to live with. This results in some women dropping cases as they cannot take the strain of waiting for their cases to come to court. The Met's Deputy Commissioner told the Committee that the Met is seeing a high proportion of cases in relation to rape and other sexual offences drop away because the victim no longer wants to support a prosecution.<sup>28</sup> This has caused a real drop in public confidence in the system, where fewer people will report crimes to the police, at a time when more reporting is needed.

Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs) and Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVAs), and other specialist provision, play a crucial role in addressing VAWG. The Committee has previously recommended an increase in IDVA and ISVA provision in London, and welcomes the support and funding from the Mayor.<sup>29</sup> However, services remain stretched. We urge the Government to support investment in both IDVA and ISVA provision and ensure investment matches demand.

#### Recommendations

The Government must work with the police and CPS to ensure justice for all victims and survivors of VAWG.

The Committee urges the Government to take swift action to avoid a further build-up of cases and address issues of capacity in the criminal justice system.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Police and Crime Committee, <u>Sexual offences double</u>, November 2019

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Police and Crime Committee, <u>Letter to Rt. Hon Robert Buckland QC MP, Secretary of State – rape and sexual assualt</u>, 26 October 2020

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> <u>Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee</u>, 16 September 2020

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Police and Crime Committee, <u>Letter to Rt. Hon Robert Buckland QC MP, Secretary of State – rape and sexual assualt</u>,
26 October 2020

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> <u>Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee</u>, 17 March 2021

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Police and Crime Committee, <u>Domestic abuse</u>, April 2020

The Government should consider a strategy that includes more Independent Sexual Violence Advocates and Independent Domestic Violence Advisers, with better support for victims going through the courts.

## A London perspective

The Committee has welcomed progress made in London to tackle VAWG, but recognises that more needs to be done, and quickly, to encourage victims to come forward; to ensure that all victims voices are heard; and, in the longer term, provide solutions that can prevent VAWG from happening in the first place. However, although 15 per cent of all recorded sexual offences take place in the capital, only six per cent of government funding comes to London.<sup>30</sup> Additional funding, in proportion to the number of recorded sexual offences, would begin to address this work and provide the support victims and survivors in London need.

The Mayor has made a commitment that he will ensure that the Met enhances domestic abuse training for its officers to ensure it "get the first contact with a survivor right".<sup>31</sup> The Committee firmly believes that the initial response by police officers to victims of all forms of VAWG should be looked at, and, in particular, that training is provided for officers on the different types of domestic abuse experienced (for example, financial or coercive control, child-parent abuse or emotional abuse) and harmful practices.

## Vulnerable groups

There is concern that children's voices are excluded from discussions around VAWG. For example, the language used around young victims centres on how 'children are witnessing' or 'exposed to domestic abuse', instead of also acknowledging them as victims.<sup>32</sup> In written evidence received by the Committee, we were told that from 2017/19 there has been a significant increase in repeat hospital appearances for young people aged 13-24 relating to domestic and sexual abuse.<sup>33</sup> The Committee also heard that specialist support for children has been declining. Evidence submitted reported that the percentage of domestic abuse services providing dedicated support to children and young people fell from 62 per cent in 2010 to 52 per cent in 2017.<sup>34</sup>

Child victims of domestic abuse are usually referred into child sexual exploitation services, often because there is nothing else available to support them. A HMICFRS inspection of the Met in March 2019 found that opportunities to act quickly and decisively to protect children and prevent offending were being missed and that the lack of supervision of investigators, along with a high workload, was contributing to delays in investigations leaving children at risk.<sup>35</sup> In reviewing and updating its VAWG strategy, the Government must ensure that children are at the forefront of safeguarding policies.

A lack of specialised domestic abuse services for older people in London has meant that they, particularly those aged over 65, are often referred through adult safeguarding processes as opposed

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> MOPAC, <u>Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) MOPAC Evidence and Insight</u>, June 2019

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Mayor of London, <u>A Safer City for all Londoners</u>, March 2017

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Joanna Sharpen, Against Violence and Abuse, Police and Crime Committee, 30 October 2019

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Solace Women's Aid, Written evidence provided to the Police and Crime Committee

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Safe Lives, Written evidence provided to the Police and Crime Committee

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> HMICFRS National Child Protection Post-Inspection Review: Metropolitan Police Service, March 2019

to domestic abuse processes. The older community may also experience more difficulty in accessing support, for example, those who continue to live for long periods of time with the perpetrator and where abuse has then been normalised and accepted.

In October 2019, Danny Tatlow from Action on Elder Abuse, told the Committee that older people in particular are absent from VAWG strategies; the usual victim type is not an older person and there is a huge lack of specialised services for the specific problems and challenges that older people have that younger victims might not.<sup>36</sup> For example, if the perpetrator is a carer for the victim or if an older person is left trapped in a household through a lack of access to finances. The Committee has heard that, as a victim gets older, the abuse moves away from sexual and physical, towards economic and psychological. In addition, most older victims are likely to hide their suffering as they are often dealing with other issues such as social isolation and loneliness and are afraid to speak up. The Government's strategy must address this.

## Protection of victims

The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) enables the police to disclose information to a victim or potential victim of domestic abuse about their partner's or ex-partner's previous abusive or violent offending. It recognises two procedures for disclosing information: "Right to ask" is triggered by a member of the public applying to the police for a disclosure. "Right to know" is triggered by the police making a proactive decision to disclose information to protect a potential victim.

The Committee believes that the DVDS can provide potentially lifesaving information on the history of a partner. It allows individuals to make an informed choice based on the risks posed to themselves and their family in starting a relationship with an individual. Yet, the DVDS isn't prioritised. The system is reliant on overstretched police forces inputting information to a centralised database. If this data is not managed correctly, serial perpetrators slip through the cracks, particularly if they have moved between different areas and across different police forces. The inconsistency in this reporting leads to devastating consequences. This must be addressed.

In 2018, the London Assembly called for a Domestic Abusers Register.<sup>37</sup> While the Committee welcomes the steps taken in the Domestic Abuse Bill to bring together the strongest elements of the existing protective order regime (including Criminal Behaviour Orders and Domestic Violence Protection Orders - DVPOs) into "one comprehensive flexible order", the Committee is concerned that DVPOs do not offer the same level of protection as a Register.

The DVDS and Domestic Abuse Protection Notices (DAPNs) and Orders (DAPOs) place the onus on the victim to report and deal with the crime they were subjected to. A cultural shift is urgently needed, where police forces focus on the perpetrator of the crime, collect and share intelligence about their offending behaviour and assess and manage their risk. The Committee believes that a register would shift the burden away from victims and survivors. It would minimise the burden on police forces and allow forces to categorise the threat posed by offenders. The Committee asks the Government to review the effectiveness of police powers that are being used to protect victims of domestic abuse.

The Committee acknowledges the Domestic Abuse Bill as a vital step forward for victims and survivors of domestic abuse. However, the Bill, as currently drafted, does not do enough to tackle

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> <u>Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee</u>, 30 October 2019
<sup>37</sup> London Assembly, <u>Domestic Abusers Register Campaign</u>, January 2018

the threat posed by serial stalkers and domestic abusers. That is why we urge you to support Amendment 164 in the name of Baroness Royall of Blaisdon, Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb and Baroness Brinton. This seeks to update the Criminal Justice Act 2003 to make arrangements for serial domestic abuse or stalking offenders to be registered on the Violent and Sexual Offenders Register (ViSOR) and be subjected to supervision, monitoring and management through Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements.

The London Assembly has campaigned for stronger measures to manage and track serial stalkers and domestic abuse offenders since 2017. This amendment is the most effective way of establishing a system to track serial perpetrators – something which is currently missing from the Bill. Our campaign is supported by the Mayor of London and the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime and thousands of Londoners.

## Recommendation

The Government should set out in its strategy how it intends to meet its equalities obligations and support all victims of domestic abuse, including refuge provision for children and older victims.

The Committee recommends that the Government includes in its VAWG strategy a commitment to reviewing the effectiveness of the current orders and notices in place to strengthen powers to protect victims of domestic abuse and violence.

The Government should consider procedures that allow the police to have the necessary tools to tackle the issues arising from repeat offenders for all forms of VAWG. This should include a Domestic Abusers Register.

In conclusion, the Government must lead the response to tackling and preventing VAWG, including providing support to victims and survivors. In particular, the Committee asks the Government to:

- support women and girls to have the confidence to report VAWG
- ensure the Government's VAWG strategy is adequately resourced and able to deliver on its priorities
- engage with the third sector to understand the nature, needs and priorities of victims and survivors
- protect and build on the network of specialist support services, and ensure the right resources in the right places
- address the shortage of safe and secure accommodation for victims of VAWG
- work with the police to ensure adequate training for police officers on VAWG, including harmful practices, domestic abuse and rape and sexual violence

Finally, the Committee urges the Government to work closely with the Mayor of London and MOPAC to increase understanding of VAWG in the capital and ensure the provision of dedicated and specialist support to survivors and those at risk.

Yours sincerely,

UDesa:

Unmesh Desai AM Chair of the Police and Crime Committee