

London Assembly Police and Crime Committee – 30 October 2019

Transcript of Agenda Item 5 – Domestic Abuse

Unmesh Desai AM (Chair): We now move to the main item for today's discussion on domestic abuse. Welcome to City Hall and to this important discussion about domestic abuse in our capital. I am Unmesh Desai, Assembly Member for City and East London and I chair the London Assembly's Police and Crime Committee.

The London Assembly is a crucial check on the Mayor of London. It is responsible for examining his decisions and actions to ensure his promises to Londoners are delivered and for investigating and championing issues that are important to the capital. Our 25 Members come together to try to achieve consensus and the big issues and what we think the Mayor needs to be doing on issues such as transport, environment, housing and policing - like today - so that London can continue to be the great city that it is.

The Police and Crime Committee, whose members are here with you today, ensures that the Mayor is delivering on the promises made to Londoners in his Police and Crime Plan. We examine his work and the work of the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC), as well as regularly questioning that body and the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) on their decisions. We carry out in-depth investigations into other issues related to policing and crime in the capital - for example, we just issued a report on hate crime in the capital - and we make recommendations to the Mayor for actions that he can take to keep Londoners safe. Our recent work has resulted in recommendations to the Mayor, the MPS and the Government, as I said, on issues such as hate crime and also female offending and serious youth violence.

Our major piece of work now is looking at domestic abuse, a crime which currently makes up nearly 10% of the offences recorded by the MPS each year. In 2018 this equated to just over 85,000 recorded domestic abuse offences. Nearly 24,000 of those offences involved violence with injury and 23 were domestic abuse homicides. Already this year there have been just under 67,000 domestic abuse offences recorded by the MPS and these are just the offences that are reported and recorded.

The Mayor aims through his interventions to encourage new domestic abuse victims to come forward, to reduce repeat victimisation and to reduce the number of times victims drop out of the criminal justice system. We want to know how the Mayor is doing and what else needs to be addressed. We want to hear from you about your experiences of working to tackle domestic abuse, about what works, what does not and how we can turn ideas into action. The discussions we have with you today will help our thinking about how the Mayor and others can help to keep people safe from abuse. It is great to see so many of you here and we are grateful that you gave up your time this morning to be with us.

We are going to split this morning into two broad discussions. One is on whether victims are getting the support that they need and the other is on how we can better prevent domestic abuse from happening. My colleagues will introduce each discussion. I would invite your comments - it is your morning, after all - and we may have questions that you can help us.

We have about two hours scheduled this morning, which I know is only a small amount of time to discuss such a critical issue and I appreciate that not everyone will be able to say as much as they might want to, but this morning is not the end of the debate. Please be reassured about that. Please do not worry if we do not hear

everything you want to say. We would be happy to hear from you after this meeting and we will let you know the ways that you can do that.

On that note, can I please introduce Niki Scordi, Chief Executive of Advance? For a few minutes, she will tell us about the experiences of Advance in the many boroughs that they work in. Niki.

Niki Scordi (Chief Executive, Advance): Good morning. Thank you for inviting us. My name is Niki Scordi. I am the Chief Executive of Advance. Advance was set up 20 years ago as a response to domestic abuse to improve outcomes for survivors. It was a collaboration between agencies such as the police, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), the local borough and women who were working in the sector and realised that we needed to move on and better for survivors. We were really focused on women who were reporting at the time and we set up the first colocation in police stations and then we worked on what then became the Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) model, which is a risk-based approach to abuse.

In our 20 years a lot has changed and yet not enough. As you already know the numbers of those suffering from domestic abuse are at epidemic levels, I would say. We still have 2 million people every year who suffer from domestic abuse. We have at least one in four women who will experience it in their lifetime and one in five children who will suffer it or live with it. We still have at least two women killed every week by an ex or current partner. It is one of the biggest crimes and incidents that women suffer particularly. The majority of domestic abuse incidents, as you say, go unreported.

Having said that, you have just said that 2018 had one of the highest levels of incidents reported in London. I will also say, it was one of the highest domestic homicides in five years. We have had 29 domestic homicides in London in 2019 and, if I compare it to the year before, it was 9, and so it is definitely a rising issue.

In terms of our local experience, we work across a number of London boroughs and we have seen a similar increase. We had a 20% increase in referrals in just the last three years. We have referrals increasing not just from our agencies like police, social care, health and housing, but we also have an increase in self-referrals. Women are coming forward themselves. We are seeing that more women are coming forward but also the level of risk that women are facing, the level of risk of serious harm or death, is increasing. Last year 49% of the women who came forward or were referred to us were at high risk as opposed to three years ago 31%. It was always a high percentage, but it is now half of those over a much higher number. We are seeing women seen at Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) doubling in three years. There has been a real increase.

There is an increase in the need and complexity of what we see with our survivors, really a 50% increase across multiple needs. About a third of the women coming forward have mental health issues that they are reporting. We know that is a lot lower than the reality and that is double what we had three years ago, and the same with issues such as problematic substance uses.

The other thing that we see with domestic abuse is often that it is a crime that comes with multiple other issues. At least a third of the women we see report stalking or harassment. That comes with it. At least one in ten also reports sexual violence in the domestic abuse setting. There is a complex level of need, an increasing level of risk and also multiple levels of domestic abuse that have been highlighted as part of our domestic abuse bail work. Coercive control, which became a crime about three years ago, is pretty much present in most incidents reported; in our case between 85% and 90% of the survivors who come to us. It is not always reported or picked up by the police and that is something that we can talk about in terms of improvements that are needed.

We do see physical abuse, not always initially but certainly as abuse escalates, and we do see an awful lot of economic abuse as well as psychological and emotional. Economic abuse often means that women end up committing crimes for survival and that often ends very much with them linked with or caught up in the criminal justice system as female offenders. Over six out of 10 of the women we support as part of the formal offender service are also domestic abuse survivors. We know that that is much higher.

The other thing we see is that women will stay longer in relationships in domestic abuse situations because they fear moving away or homelessness, they fear for their safety. They are not sure that the support that they need will be there or that it will be there consistently.

I have some positive news. Over the last 10 years there definitely have been changes in terms of focusing on the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy, domestic abuse being part of that, not as much as we would like to see but certainly seeing the Mayor's Office making VAWG a priority over the last three years has been very positive. We have seen some funding supporting that policy. We have seen the Home Office also do so with legislation like [including] coercive control in the Domestic Abuse Bill 2019.

We have seen some changes with social media as well. We are seeing a real increase in women coming forward and talking about it following the #MeToo movement.

What that has done for us as organisations and as services is definitely increased demand by 25% but also it has put us under a lot of pressure at a time when we have also seen in the last 10 years austerity and the impact that that has had on local authorities, in particular in London. If I quote just our services, we have had a 20% decrease in our funding in just the last four years at a time when we have seen a 25% increase. That has meant that we are having to focus on increasing our criteria and so we are being asked to focus on women with higher risk, not necessarily a higher level of need, just to make sure that women are safe as a first concern. We are seeing women for much shorter than we would like and so we are acting as a little bit of a band aid at the moment. We are less of a long-term solution and more of a short-term approach.

In terms of solutions going forward, there will be many of us who will support the view that we need to stop repeat victimisation because we are seeing a quarter of our referrals as repeat victims, which is the highest you would see for any crime.

Unmesh Desai AM (Chair): Thank you, Niki [Scordi], for your insights and for the continuing work that you do to support those who are experiencing domestic abuse.

Can I now introduce my colleague, Assembly Member Caroline Pidgeon MBE, who will start us off on the first of our two discussions, which is on whether victims of domestic abuse are getting the support that they need.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Thank you, Niki [Scordi], for giving that context to the discussion we are going to start now. You mentioned the Mayor has published his Police and Crime Plan and also his VAWG Strategy. Within those there are some commitments, we know, around refuges and safer accommodation, the IDVAs, and also effective training for officers to make sure that that contact with a survivor is right the first time.

What we really want to understand from you and from the people you work with day in day out is whether victims and survivors of domestic abuse are getting the support that they need. This could be in terms of helping victims to recognise that what they are experiencing is abuse, particularly from some of the other evidence we have had to date around things like parent-child abuse, peer-on-peer abuse and also coercive control and financial abuse that Niki has touched on there, and also it might be in terms of getting the support to come forward and report this to the police because we know it is significantly under-reported.

We would like to know if there are any particular challenges for groups, whether it is male victims, whether it is black and minority ethnic (BAME) Londoners or the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, plus (LGBT+) community. Are there particular issues there that we should know about?

We also really would like to hear your experience of the police response. We have heard that generally it can be good, but we know that they are a stretched resource. Police are working in different ways across merged boroughs. Is that causing an issue as well? Also, do you think that what the Mayor is planning to do or has put in his strategies is going far enough? What else needs to be done? I really want to hear from you.

If you could perhaps put your hand up if you would like to contribute and say your name and which organisation you are from? We have a little map here of who is sitting where, although I am counting chairs and it does not quite match up and so I am slightly confused. If you could give maybe just one sentence on what your organisation does, that would be really helpful. I know other Members have lots of questions to ask, too.

Suzanne Jacob OBE (Chief Executive, SafeLives): My name is Suzanne Jacob. I am Chief Executive of SafeLives, which is a United Kingdom domestic abuse charity. I am very glad that this debate is happening this morning. It is really helpful.

In terms of some of the questions that you asked, we know from the data that we hold - which is quite considerable at SafeLives - that the duration that somebody is living with abuse is going up at the moment. That had come down to an average of two and a half years. It is now back up at over three years, which shows that there is something going wrong in the system. Exactly as Niki [Scordi] said - and I would support everything that Niki said - reports are rising at the same time that resources are very stretched.

That looks very different if you are from different parts of the community. If you are a black woman, you are likely to live with domestic abuse for longer before services are able to identify and support you. You are also more likely to end up in a refuge than be supported to be safe in your own home. There are some inequalities that work in the system. Equally, if you are LGBT+ you are far less likely to be identified and your case heard at the MARAC process. It is only 1.5% of cases in London; it should be at least 5%, in our view. There are some real difficulties there around who is being identified, who is being supported and how all communities across London are served.

Then we also need to really think carefully about what is going on for children and young people. Niki talked about IDVAs, who help people stay safely in their own homes. We know that there is a bare minimum requirement for those in London, but we have a real disparity between what is going on for adults and what is going on for children and young people because there are so few services. If we want to ever get upstream of domestic abuse and stop the cycles repeating, we are going to have to put a lot more effort into connecting that with other experiences that young people are having.

In terms of the MPS, to coin a phrase, some of my best friends are MPS officers, but the MPS struggles with issues like this one. It is trapped on the one side by its big national role in things like counterterrorism. It is trapped on the other side around things like public order and needing to police various big events. Domestic abuse often gets quite squashed within those big responsibilities that it has, even if it has good intentions. Domestic abuse does not have particularly high status within the MPS. There is some work that the Commissioner [of Police of the Metropolis] and others could do around the status that is given to officers who really stand out in their work to counter domestic abuse.

Finally, because I know I have taken a lot of time, we need a really strong perpetrator strategy. We are extremely pleased that the Mayor's invested in perpetrator work in London and we hope that that will continue because, until we tackle the root cause of domestic abuse, we are not going to stop it.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Lovely. Thank you, Suzanne. That was very helpful.

Ngozi Fulani (Founder, Sistah Space): Hi. I am going to stand up so that you can all see me. The reason I am going to stand up so that you can all see me is because, as black women, we are usually invisible in plain sight.

There is much that I want to contribute but because of time I am going to keep it very short. The room does not reflect us. The panel does not really reflect us, although I see what we call a sister. I am from an organisation called Sistah Space. We support African and Caribbean heritage women and girls affected by domestic and sexual abuse. We have been going for four years, with no funding because, every time we apply for funding, somebody else is speaking with our voice.

We are almost in 2020. There are no refuges for black women. Let me say African and Caribbean heritage women because the title of black women seems to have gone. It is really important that we have a chance to be in the room today and so we are going to speak.

I know that my colleagues from SafeLives are here. They are from the body that gives IDVAs their qualification. We have been having a long dialogue because we are absent from their training as well. You will see no reference to African and Caribbean heritage women and girls. Most organisations are the same. The higher up you go the less you see us.

Black women are suffering and dying from domestic abuse and nobody is listening. It has to change now.

I am just going to end with this story of how we came about. In 2014 Valerie Forde, a Hackney woman, went to the police because she was being threatened. It was put down as a threat to property. Subsequently, she and her 23-month-old daughter were murdered with a machete, a hammer and a screwdriver. Our community is not going to the police, there is no trust there. We do not see ourselves reflected anywhere. This is the room and this is the time.

I am going to mention Black History Month. It is an achievement for us today because we are in the room and we are at the table - or we are near the table - and that is a first. I do not say that lightly. That is something that needs to be taken on board.

Training is a must. Panel, I urge you. We deliver training from our mouths and from our experience. Nobody can talk for us. There is a lot you do not understand, panel and organisations, about African and Caribbean heritage women and girls. Please, I urge you to change this. I give thanks.

Florence Eshalomi AM: Hear, hear! Thank you.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Thank you very much. That was very powerful.

Ippo Panteloudakis (Head of Services, Respect): Good morning. Thank you. I am Ippo Panteloudakis, Head of Services at Respect. I am here today with my two hats on, one is for male victims of domestic abuse and the other is for perpetrators.

In relation to what we are discussing today, what we are seeing in relation to bail victims is a lack of service provision in the Greater London area. We find that unacceptable in 2019 that one of the greatest cities in the world lacks refuge service provision for male victims of domestic abuse. They have nowhere to go.

There is an issue with commissioning in that many contracts are rolled into one and the services that already have that contract, usually VAWG services, are asked to work with male victims, which does not meet the needs of male victims or female victims. It effectively takes away funding from women's needs because they are asked to use the same amount of money to accommodate male victims of domestic violence. We do not think this is acceptable. New funding should be made available for specialist provision for what men need, which is not necessarily the same as what women need. We need to stop having this competition between male and female services because this type of commissioning has had exactly that effect.

With my other hat on, again, on behalf of Respect, I would like to speak about the call to action, which is supported by MOPAC alongside another 60 organisations. It draws on the expertise of services that have been funded by MOPAC such as the Drive Project in Croydon. I will leave it here. Thank you.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Great. Thank you very much indeed.

Mark Brooks OBE (Chairman, ManKind Initiative): Thank you. My name is Mark Brooks. I am the Chair of the ManKind Initiative, which supports male victims.

I just want to add on to what my colleague Ippo [Panteloudakis] said. One in four victims of domestic abuse and partner abuse in London is a man. Whilst we have seen an increase in services overall, there is not enough, albeit the police response is far better. Only 5% of the people who use domestic abuse services in London are men and that includes men being referred to a MARAC.

Some of that is down to the narrative on domestic abuse in London. If you look at a lot of the Mayor's statements, when he talks about domestic abuse, he frames it as an issue that only affects women. He never mentions male victims. We really need an awareness campaign that is not only pan-London but also through the London boroughs to encourage more men and agencies to refer more men to those services. We also think those services need to be clearly labelled as being available for men. We see a lot of websites where the council services are advertised but, again, the framing and the imagery often do not even mention men when they are available.

To add to what Ippo [Panteloudakis] said about the refuges and safe houses, there are safe houses all around the country but none in London. That remains a scandal.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: For men?

Mark Brooks OBE (Chairman, ManKind Initiative): Yes, in London. In terms of men with children, including obviously, sons and daughters, when they need to find a refuge or safe house, they have to go to places like Northamptonshire to escape. That is not good enough in an inclusive, diverse capital city anymore. Thank you.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Lovely.

Joanna Sharpen (Director of Policy and Projects, Against Violence and Abuse): Hi. I am Joanna Sharpen, Director of Policy at Against Violence and Abuse (AVA). We are a national VAWG charity.

I wanted to bring the voice of survivors into the room. It is really important that when you are making any decisions and taking any evidence you must hear from survivors because they are the experts by their own experience. I really hope that you will be also talking to them.

Last week I was talking to a group of 15 and 14-year-old women who have experienced domestic violence. This was in Haringey. One of the young women said to me, "If I was assaulted again or if I was raped again, I would not go to the police because to them, I am just a statistic and I am not a person". They would go to their local organisation, which was Solace Women's Aid, and they said, "There I am actually treated with compassion and I am a person first not just a number". To me, it is appalling that a 14-year-old who has already experienced horrific abuse does then not have the faith to be able to go to the police.

Also, children's voices generally are silenced from these kinds of issues and debates. MOPAC is currently funding AVA to do a project around Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) and helping to get children's voices and experience into those reviews, which is crucial because they hold such important evidence. Also, they want to talk about their experiences. If we are continuing to silence children, we are then colluding with the perpetrator. We are reinforcing that victim-blaming language and also the language that we also always read about children and how they are 'witnessing' or that they are 'exposed' to domestic violence. They are not; they are direct victims and yet they are still silenced constantly by services as well as the perpetrators. I want to make sure that their voices are heard within this review.

Also, I echo what Niki [Scordi] was saying around multiple disadvantage. We know how common it is for women who have experienced domestic violence to also be experiencing mental health issues, substance use, homelessness and all those sorts of issues. We recently ran a national commission into domestic violence and multiple disadvantage with Agenda called Breaking Down the Barriers (2019). It was chaired by [The Rt Hon] Baroness Armstrong. You can read our report on that. We also worked with Experts by Experience to do their own research and report around what women need.

We really need to stop seeing these issues in silos. Women are constantly passed from pillar to post to deal with this issue and they are told, "We cannot deal with your mental health because you need to sort out your substance use", and then the substance use services cannot work with them because of their mental health issues, and all the time they are navigating the complex reality of living with domestic violence. We need to have better colocated services with navigator models and one-stop shops. We need to be making sure that we are addressing all these issues because they go hand in hand. We cannot just be looking at these issues in silos.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Lovely. Thank you very much indeed for that, Joanna [Sharpen]. Before I bring our next speaker in, I would like to take the opportunity to welcome students and staff from Bolton School Girls Division who have come along today to observe some of our meeting. Hello there. We are the Police and Crime Committee and today we are looking at the very serious issue of domestic abuse. We have an open-mic session with a number of guests before us who work in this field in London to get from them exactly what is happening on the front line.

Sherry Peck (Chief Executive, Safer London): Thank you. My name is Sherry Peck. I am Chief Executive at Safer London. I have a couple of points and so I will try to be quick.

The first thing is that Safer London runs the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal, funded by the Mayor's Office, which is a voluntary arrangement between every London borough and most of the large housing providers in London to offer moves to people who are victims of violence. This has been set up for only a couple of years and has been relatively successful.

If there is a barrier to that work, it is the size of properties. We can get moves done relatively quickly for people who want one or two-bedroom houses and, as I say, it is a reciprocal arrangement. Once you are talking about larger families, it becomes far more difficult because those properties are not available in London within the social rented sphere. That is definitely a barrier.

In a lot of our work, we work to prevent young people getting involved in violence and exploitation and so very often we come across young people who have been living with domestic violence. However, the one thing that I wanted to talk to you about was strengthening the pathway for young people who are victims of intimate domestic violence. We so often get referrals into our child sexual exploitation services (CSES) because there is nothing else to work with young people who are not victims of sexual exploitation but are actually victims of intimate domestic abuse. There really needs to be a strengthening of that pathway as well.

Rather than take up too much time because I could go into great detail about the impact on young people who are brought up in households where they are experiencing domestic abuse, there are lots of people in the room who can give you that, but we have a wealth of evidence of the impact that that has on both young girls and young boys.

The last thing, just adding to what my colleague here from Sistah Space said, is that I am really pleased to see that there are at least a couple of black women in the room - one on the panel, one here - speaking for black women. Can I just say? Please, when you are thinking about diversity, do not forget about the Gypsy and Traveller community. Domestic abuse is huge in the Gypsy and Traveller community. I am guessing that they are definitely not represented on the panel and that is an even bigger omission. It is a huge issue within that community and I am very happy to speak to you about that afterwards if you want.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Thank you. If you have some evidence on that, that is very interesting. We have talked about a number of areas but that is obviously --

Sherry Peck (Chief Executive, Safer London): It is probably worth saying that I am from that community and so at least we are represented at this side of the room.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: You are very aware [of the issue]. Lovely. Thank you very much.

Rebecca Lunn (Head of Operations, Suzy Lamplugh Trust): Good morning. My name is Rebecca Lunn and I am here from the Suzy Lamplugh Trust. We run the national stalking helpline.

I will start by saying that we have had some fantastic news recently from the Mayor, who has provided us with funding to be able to enhance our service for victims of stalking in London, which is really good news.

There are a couple of points I just wanted to make. A large number of the victims that we support are victims of domestic abuse, but I did also just want to raise the 45% of non-intimate stalker cases that we support where they face the same risks through the delusion of a relationship but do not actually fall within the domestic violence remit. We do find that for those victims there are far fewer services available, which is a huge concern that we have.

With regards to all the victims that we support, the point I wanted to raise is that we really feel very strongly about how key early intervention is and that, by the first response that a victim receives from the police when they report such a crime, it is recognised as stalking and that the seriousness and the level of risk that these victims face is properly identified and responded to. So often, we have situations where a victim reports stalking and it is not identified. It is often seen as a one-off incident dealt as low-level harassment and therefore is not appropriately dealt with from that point of response. The victim is not believed and is not

given an appropriate response and it therefore progresses through the criminal justice system with victims feeling that they are not being believed and are not being taken seriously.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Thank you very much for that.

Camille Rouse (Legal Advice Service Manager, London Black Women's Project): Hi. I am Camille from the London Black Women's Project. I am the Legal Service Manager. We [the London Black Women's Project] are a specialist BAME organisation and so we support BAME and migrant women who are victims of various forms of violence. As you might be aware, funding for specialist services is being cut across the country and funding is given to more generic services. The issue with that is that women from our communities trust us. They know who we are. They come to see us. The danger is that if funding is given to more generic services, women might not seek help or speak out.

When it comes to challenges to reporting to the police, most of our women have insecure immigration status and so their fear is being criminalised by the police. They would rather not call the police at all because, instead of being protected, they are being questioned about what their status is and what their rights are to be in this country. That is a major issue that we are dealing with every day.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Could you just clarify the point you are saying about more generic services receiving funding? Has that been in this area as well from MOPAC in its recent commissioning or is that just a general point?

Camille Rouse (Legal Advice Service Manager, London Black Women's Project): It is a general point.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: OK. That is helpful. Thank you.

Amtal Rana (Chief Executive Officer, Kiran Support Services): I am Amtal Rana from Kiran Support Services. We [Kiran Support Services] are an Asian women's specialist refuge in the London Borough of Waltham Forest. A lot of what has been said in this room today I would echo.

However, I would add to what my colleague here has said about commissioning of services. When you are a very small organisation and general commissioning takes place in your borough and you lose your funding to a generic organisation, one worker cannot represent a black Asian or any BAME person, just as my colleague from Sistah Space was saying. One size does not fit all. When you are talking about commissioning, it is often a very small pot of money and there are a lot of organisations vying for that pot of funding. It makes it very difficult for small organisations to put bids together. We do not have the resources to pay consultants to come in and write a really good bid. That was one of the things and I am sure a lot of other people have mentioned that lot as well.

Again, I also do not want to take up too much time, but one of the things that my colleague here from Advance was saying was about short-term services or short-term funding. It seems that a lot of strategies that are being put in place, whether it is by MOPAC or whether it is by commissioning at local authority level, it is really short term. It is three years or perhaps it might be five years. However, when you are an organisation and you are trying to support vulnerable women and their children, you cannot just be sitting behind a desk just churning out funding applications. You have to look at the bigger picture. As an organisation, we lost our contract to provide a specialist refuge in our borough in 2015. We are working independently now with funding from the Lottery.

I would like to say that we have seen an increase from 37% of women coming to us with insecure immigration status up to about 80% or 85% of the women that come to us now with insecure immigration status. It puts

huge pressure on our staff because the resources are not there. If you do not have enough members of staff, if you do not have a children's worker, you cannot provide that support. I know a lot of this goes back to commissioning and funding, but it really is very key that you understand as a panel how that lack of funding affects organisations and especially small grassroots-level organisations.

One of the other things I would like to make a point about is the police. The response is very patchy. You can get a very good response, but you can also get a police officer saying on the other end of the phone, "I do not want to speak to you because you are the caseworker. I need to speak to the woman". If she cannot speak English, she is not going to be able to speak to a police officer. Then we have examples of women where they might have gone for an antenatal check-up and they may have an insecure immigration status and they are being policed. They are being reported to the police. They are not being seen as victims.

These are the kinds of things that need to be addressed. The rest of it most of my colleagues have covered. Thank you.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Thank you. Coming across very loudly and clearly is the volume is going up of reports and we know it is under-reported as well and it is the capacity you all have to be able to help support these victims.

Evan Jones (Head of Community Services, St Giles Trust): I am Evan Jones from St Giles Trust. We [St Giles Trust] are not a domestic abuse specialist but in our services in prisons and the community we see a disproportionate number of people who have been affected by domestic abuse.

I wanted to pick up on the point that Sherry [Peck] and others were making that it is not just the adults but the children who are victims of this issue as well. We are looking at violence as a public health issue and we are trying to think about how we spend intelligently and spend early. If more resources were put into supporting the children whom we know have been exposed to corrosive control and domestic abuse, we would be reducing the number of people who are potentially susceptible to the offer of gangs, county lines and serious youth violence.

When we look at our caseloads, when we get to know our clients well, almost 100% of the young people involved in gangs and youth violence and county lines have been exposed to really awful situations in their homes. That is really common. If that had been picked up earlier, we think there would have been a chance of some of those young people not being so open to that offer, not being so attracted to this alternative family that the gang can offer and not being so drawn to the dominant figure in the room. Something the children in these situations learn is that you have to stick with the person who is the top dog. That creates a lot of risk. We see most commissioned domestic abuse services do not have enough resource to support the children. They barely have enough resource to support the women in the IDVA model. It is about safety planning and it is about emergencies. Caseloads are very high. If more resource was put into the children, we would see, maybe in 10 years' time, a reduction in the young people involved in gangs and other youth violence.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Thank you for that. A big theme that is coming out is the children and young people.

Amy Kelly (Director of Operations, RISE Mutual CIC): Thank you. Hello. My name is Amy Kelly. I am here representing RISE Mutual today. Thank you for inviting me and thank you to all my colleagues as well.

I echo a lot of their points, but there are specific messages I want to put forward. Really, to reduce the number of victims, we have to have more robust national services working with perpetrators. Sixty per cent is still

incredibly low and it is poor. If we think of public health issues, if we think of resources and finances, if it is invested in heavily now, the long-term benefits would be huge to end domestic abuse.

I also want to echo from different services here that I observe from working with perpetrators the lack of cultural training and the lack of understanding of different people around coercive behaviour, stalking and harassment, the different typologies of behaviour. That does not just also isolate communities because we have to have a co-ordinated community response that involves everybody from the grassroots up. It not only re-prejudices individuals but it also then isolates victims once again. The SafeLives colleagues were talking about how victims are staying longer with their abusive partners. That is shocking.

I had the privilege of working on the Drive Project in Croydon and that has been a fascinating eye-opener. My background is social work and I can see that from working in different professions we have some concerning things going on. We have fantastic police colleagues in Croydon, and I have had fantastic police colleagues across London, but what concerns me is sometimes the lack of understanding around manipulation and coercion, the lack of understanding around the barriers of isolation and around immigration, and already historic or existing barriers around different cultures. That is something that has to be tackled on a much bigger scale, but when we talk about domestic abuse being squashed between other massively important issues, that is also a concern.

I want to thank and echo everybody's points here today and I see everybody here as my colleague. Thank you.

Peter Kelley (Services Manager, Galop): Hi, everyone. I would echo that. I am Peter Kelley. I am from Galop. We [Galop] are an LGBT+ anti-violence charity. Some of you might know us through the hate crime work.

In terms of what has changed over the last 10 years, 10 years ago LGBT+ survivors of domestic abuse and violence were largely absent from the discourse on domestic abuse. According to Public Health England about 5% of Londoners identify as non-heterosexual and so are LGBT+. As Suzanne [Jacob] from SafeLives was saying earlier, we are often absent from mainstream domestic abuse services and things like MARAC. Until recently there has been no LGBT+ IDVAs. For the first time 10 years MOPAC is now funding that through our partnership work with Victim Support.

In terms of victims and survivors, what do we know? There is certainly a parity of domestic abuse experienced by LGBT+ people, but gay and bisexual men, for example, are twice as likely as heterosexual men to experience domestic abuse or violence from their intimate partner or families. Half of our clients are from BAME backgrounds as well and so there are intersectional issues around complex and multiple needs and different identities there.

Our services have been working for about 10 years and we have seen an increase of about 118% in help seekers from the communities we work with there. There is, to echo some of the other speakers here, a need for specialist services. As Ippo [Panteloudakis] and Mark [Brooks] were saying, there is no refuge accommodation for LGBT+ people, particularly male survivors but also trans and nonbinary survivors. There are no perpetrator programmes for LGBT+ victims and survivors.

The last point I would make is about the police. Again, there has been a lot of change in recognising domestic violence in the MPS, but the police currently do not flag LGBT+ victims and survivors. We are trying to encourage the police to flag when there is same-sex domestic violence or family domestic violence so that we are able to use that in the commissioning process and make sure that the voices of LGBT+ survivors are heard. Thank you.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Thank you, Peter. There were some really important points there.

Heidi Riedel (Chief Executive, Woman's Trust): My name is Heidi Riedel. I am the Chief Executive of Woman's Trust. We are a therapeutic service for women who have experienced domestic abuse. We work predominantly in east and west London.

I really want to highlight the mental health needs of survivors of domestic abuse. Domestic abuse is the biggest cause of depression in women. Many women who come to us suffer from anxiety, low self-esteem, low confidence and post-traumatic stress disorder. They find everyday life really difficult and hence find it very difficult to engage with other services, not even to think about the police.

We know that women come by different routes. They might go directly to practical support services. We get many referrals from the advocacy services in London. We also know that quite a number of women come to us first and we need to address these needs first before they are able to engage with any other services.

The funding for this work is absolutely patchy. In very many VAWG strategies it is not put in or it is mentioned as a priority but none of the departments put any money into it. Recently when there have been tenders, we have not been able to engage because the budget that was available was left for the for the mental health provision and we just could not provide the work. We had to say no and step back because we cannot go into contracts and then have to subsidise and find the funding from somewhere else, which is really difficult. It would be really important to see this.

With regard to MOPAC, it is the same. The funding from MOPAC we have to apply for year on year on year. We put a lot of resources into it and not one year are we ending up with funding, which makes me think. Why is this put out in a way that invites organisations like us but then we are not ending up with funding?

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Do you ever get feedback on why you have not been successful?

Heidi Riedel (Chief Executive, Woman's Trust): Yes, but we have not received feedback in this particular round, but often the feedback we get is that there is great competition and the budget is quite low. Then we see the majority of our funding goes, which is very important work for practical support services, but we need to recognise that women also need the mental health support.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Yes. Lovely. Thank you.

Lyndsey Dearlove (Head of UK Says NO MORE, Hestia): Hi. I am Lyndsey from Hestia, which is a pan-London charity that works with victims of abuse. We have refuges, IDVA services, MARAC, counselling services, community-based outreach support groups and also, we are the home of UK Says NO MORE national campaign. In some ways, it gives us a good understanding of how things happen differently in different parts of London.

There are a couple of points. My colleagues have said incredibly important things but one of the things that is important to us that we need to ensure that there are services for children. Over the past 10 years, we have seen a dramatic decrease in the funding for those services, but also the ability to have them long term. We talk about recovery and we think about recovery at the point of separation and for a couple of months after you have left, but for a child it is a significant journey. We need to ensure that that safe space is available for them to flourish and grow and have that support. In light of that, there is also a space for the mothers and fathers who are the abused victims in a domestic abuse situation to have good support about how they parent their child through the recovery from that.

Secondly, we have spoken a lot about the fact that the survivors coming through to our services have increased need. What that really means on the ground for services is that not only do we have a reduction in the ability of staff to provide the support because we have also faced these same funding cuts as everybody else, but the other services that were in that borough and within that community have disappeared. One of the key things we spoke about 15 years ago about reducing risk and repeat victimisation was stopping isolation. How do we encourage somebody to integrate within the community and feel connected and look at recovery if those services are not there or they are leaving a refuge and then being moved far away from where they have created that network? Those things are really important.

I suppose I do not want to say too much that everybody else has said, but I want to focus a little bit on the journey with the police. For us, we see that the interaction with the police is not a single incident. It is an entire journey. It starts from the moment that you call 999 all the way until that case is transferred over to the CPS. We know from our survivors that in some instances those first calls are really great, they get the support that they need and they can access the services that they did not know perhaps existed, but for many that is not the case.

I recall a time a couple of years ago when I did a piece of work with the Ealing police. We went into the community and we did a community engagement event around domestic abuse. A woman stood up and she said that she had called the police on a number of different occasions and they had completed the risk assessment with her but she had never met the threshold for being referred to a MARAC or an IDVA service. Her question to us was, "What will be enough before someone is able to support me?"

To me, that is a huge message. We have incredible IDVA services that work around crisis intervention and we have some services in parts of London that provide long-term intervention for those who perhaps do not meet that threshold of high risk, but actually what we know from the DHRs is that those who are not meeting that high-risk threshold are highly represented within them. We have to rethink the way we deliver the support and look at recovery. Collectively, working with the Domestic Abuse Bill 2019 and the amount of people who have been willing to do it and also to listen, how can we do this better? We do need to think about prevention and we need to consider children.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Thank you.

Rachel Nicholas (Head of Service for the London Victim and Witness Service, Victim Support): Good morning, everybody. I am Rachel Nicholas, one of the Heads of Service for the London Victim and Witness Service that Victim Support is running, commissioned by MOPAC.

We are fortunate enough to have a number of partners who are in the room today - Galop and Sistah Space - but also our absent friends at Stay Safe East. We also have St Giles Trust here today, too. We also partner with Calm Mediation, a restorative justice organisation, and also Shelter, which helps us with those really tricky housing cases that we come across for both domestic abuse and also general crime victims.

One of the things that we have to our advantage is that we have IDVAs in 33 of the London boroughs, including the city of London, and so we get to see a general picture across London of the scope of domestic abuse. It is definitely - and I will echo all of my colleagues in the room - an increasing issue. Our referrals keep going up and up.

One of the challenges of such a large capital that we have is that we have 33 London boroughs and they all have different levels of service provision for domestic abuse. That makes it very difficult for our statutory partners - the police and also health - in terms of how to navigate the system of trying to make sure that that women and men get access to support. The level of support for children is very limited.

One of the things I would say about the London Victim Witness Service that is different from previous commissioning is the integration of support that is available for victims of domestic abuse who do not necessarily reach that high threshold. We have a whole team of people who work across London with people who do not meet that threshold. That is really important and I pick up that point, but there is not enough. The demand is too high. That just echoes what other people are saying in the room.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Lovely. Thank you very much.

Danny Tatlow (Research Officer, Action on Elder Abuse): Good morning. I am Danny Tatlow from Action on Elder Abuse.

I would like to echo a few other people's comments on the invisibility of certain types of victims. Older people in particular are absent from VAWG strategies. In the Mayor's current Strategy, there is one line that mentions older victims. Also, from overarching narratives, older people do not see themselves as victims of domestic abuse because they do not get the chance. The usual victim type is not an older person, be it an older woman or an older man or an older person of BAME background.

I would like to also echo comments about specialised services for older people. There is a huge lack of specialised services for older people in the London area and in the country as a whole. There are specific problems and challenges that older people have that younger victims may not. Abuse may have been normalised and accepted over a number of decades. There will be, potentially, challenges with carers for victims. If a perpetrator is a carer for the victim, they may feel that it is impossible to escape. There is also the financial ability of many older people, be they men or women, to escape or get out of a household where they feel trapped by their lack of financial means. All of these are not covered by generic services, which cannot focus on these challenges that are extremely important to older people's happiness and wellbeing.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Lovely.

Ngozi Fulani (Founder, Sistah Space): Very quickly, first of all, we do not really subscribe to the title 'BAME'. That label was put on us. We do not know it. It puts so many cultures in one pot and [makes us] look like we are all like - I do not know - one another. We really need to look at that title. We do not subscribe to that.

We want to make a mention of the Rastafarian community, who are also absent from the discussion. I would go so far as to say that many organisations would not know how to really support Rastafarians, who celebrate Christmas on 7 January. That is when the domestic abuse goes up for us. It is not known. Why is it not known? We have been here long enough.

Finally, the Windrush generation, the older generation specifically, are not reporting abuse because they do not want to get deported. I know that mainstream organisations really do not seem to be able to handle that. I am asking you, please, again, to look at these issues. I give thanks.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: That is very helpful. Thank you very much. That was the immigration status point there again.

Sian Berry AM: Just a tiny bit of clarification. Some of you have been mentioning insecure immigration status and reluctance to report. There was a high-profile case about a year and a half ago that was reported in the press. The Mayor at that point said that we need to sort things out. Have you seen an improvement since maybe last summer, 2018, when this occurred and the Mayor made some statements?

Amtal Rana (Chief Executive Officer, Kiran Support Services): We secured funding for a part-time immigration worker because we had seen an increase in the number of women who came to us with insecure immigration status. She has been in post for only about 17 or 18 months and in the first year, if I just talk about telephone inquiries around immigration, we had about 54 telephone inquiries, but from April [2019] to now we have had over 100. It has more than doubled. We have seen an increase. When we put the funding application together, about 37% of the women in our refuge had insecure immigration status and so had no recourse to public funds, but since the worker has come into post - and she works only 21 hours a week - I would say that about 90% of the women in our refuge at any one time could have insecure immigration status. That puts huge pressure on our staff. There are just not enough resources.

Sian Berry AM: That is a real sign of the pent-up demand, essentially.

Amtal Rana (Chief Executive Officer, Kiran Support Services): Absolutely, yes.

Sian Berry AM: People are being discouraged from reporting, but as soon as there is a service that is trusted --

Amtal Rana (Chief Executive Officer, Kiran Support Services): It is trusted but, also, you have to remember that we are a specialist organisation. We work with Asian women. That means that we are providing them with a free service.

There is also the whole issue around getting free legal advice. If I could give you an example, we had one woman who had been to many different agencies because of the complex issues that she has. There was debt. There was immigration. There were children. There was domestic violence. In the end, it was our organisation that was able to support her. Many other organisations failed her.

The point I am trying to make is that it is not easy. There is not one answer for all of it at all.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Lovely. Thanks.

Sherry Peck (Chief Executive, Safer London): A lot of people have talked about an increase in domestic abuse. For me, it is really important that people like you try to understand and look at the drivers for violence. One of the things that I did when I first took over at Safer London was begin to look at that because you cannot solve something until you know what is driving it. Domestic abuse and violence, whether it is youth violence or what-have-you, is a symptom and you have to begin to unpick what the cause is.

For me, all the academic evidence talks about inequality. I am not talking about poverty. I am talking about the narrowing of the middle classes and the disparity of wealth and also social injustice, which is why you are hearing from colleagues here that when people are particularly marginalised, whatever that looks like, whether it is around race or sexuality, the injustice that is put on those communities and on those individuals exacerbates violence. You can add to that those issues around shame and isolation. You really have to look at the drivers because domestic abuse is a symptom of the toxic environment we have created. That was a wider point, really.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Thank you very much for that.

Len Duvall AM: I have three points. That is a really interesting point that you raise, but then how do we talk about the abuse that goes on in the middle class and higher issues? It is part of it. I am very keen about the drivers of violence. I have been one of those who have been arguing not against knife crime on county lines

but looking at knife crime in number of domestic murders that have taken place in those statistics. We do not see that being talked about in the press.

There are a couple of points I just wanted to make generally. I get the issue: increased capacity, finance, specialist work. I get that and that all runs through.

I was taken by all the contributions, but I was very taken by the contribution about seeing children as direct victims rather than just being exposed and being a secondary aspect to this issue.

Am I clear in [thinking] that you are saying that actually we still have more work to do about attitudinal or cultural issues, not just about practitioners working in this area but across the third sector, the state sector and the people taking decisions around that, but we have a lot more work to do about raising awareness and raising the issues? That seems to be an underlying thread as well. Even though that work has increased, we still have a long way to go to do that. Is that what generally is an underlying issue?

I get the issue and I do not want to duck the issue on capacity and finance. That is not in the 'too difficult' box. We have to deal with that, but where would you put the efforts? My view is that you have to do it across the piece, but if you are rationing bits, do you concentrate on the people working with people in terms of challenging some of those issues and the way that we are tackling this issue, or do you go much wider in a wider campaign?

Lyndsey Dearlove (Head of UK Says NO MORE, Hestia): The work of UK Says NO MORE is national prevention campaign against domestic abuse and sexual violence and we have seen an interest in and a response to some of the work we have been doing around preventing it, but the number one thing that jumps out for us is that if we completely and utterly commit to doing a really fantastic awareness and prevention campaign, we also have to invest in the services that support people. If I had a choice and you only gave me a choice, I would fall back on needing to do more for children.

Niki Scordi (Chief Executive, Advance): You are right that there is a definitely more that we could do with just how we are working at the moment. There has been a lot of awareness raising. There is a lot more to be done.

It is also about consistent training and consistent support and being where the survivors need the help at the earliest point that they need it. One of the ways we have been doing that over the past years is through collocation. It is how we were set up and it is how we continue to do that where we find in boroughs - and it is very patchy - that domestic abuse support worker or an IDVA sitting with children's services, sitting with hospitals in accident and emergency (A&E) departments, in maternity wards where abuse goes up by a third on pregnancy and in sexual health clinics, in housing offices where housing officers are telling survivors they do not meet the criteria. A woman is not going to walk into a housing agency and say, "You know what? I am a victim of domestic abuse". She might not see herself as a victim. She knows that she needs to be safe and the response is not there. Meeting that criteria is getting higher and higher because of the challenges.

Back to the point that some other people made, the more we work together - police is another one - we have some good responses in certain areas. We have some specialist domestic abuse courts in certain areas, but it is very patchy across London. There are great models of best practice that have made a real difference and people can see that they work better than others. It comes to priorities.

I have sat in as many community safety partnership meetings as you would like in local authorities and, when data is presented, I hear about serious crimes against the person. I hear about burglaries and drugs. I now hear about knife crime. I never hear about domestic abuse. I have to put up my hand at every single meeting

and say, "What is the data for domestic abuse?" "It is in serious crime against the person". "You are telling me you have 400 incidents every month. How much of that is domestic abuse?" "About 50%." "And how is it doing?" "It is going up." "Well, how come that data is not being discussed as a priority at the top of this meeting?" It never is.

I will go back to the children. Many people have said that. We all know that we need to intervene earlier. I do not believe that I need to see a quarter of my referrals, a quarter of thousands of women and children, coming back again and again and again because I cannot support them, and my team cannot support them any longer than putting on a patch.

We can definitely do more with the existing resources by all of us recognising that domestic abuse is a complex crime that needs to be investigated and needs resources, but it needs to be acknowledged that it is not just an aggravated assault in one incident and is still seen as an isolated offence and is still treated as an isolated incident. That adds to the cost in the system of having to go 35 times to a survivor's home or having to see her 35 times over three or four years in a hospital and so on and so forth, but that is perhaps our short-termism and our approach and working in silos. I would like to see much more co-ordinated responses, as some other people have said, and real effort to tackle it at the earliest point and not deal with the consequences all the time.

Amy Kelly (Director of Operations, RISE Mutual CIC): I want to go back to the drivers of domestic abuse and I am coming from this in terms of gaps in knowledge, gaps in the systems and systemic practice, the need for training and understanding and listening to everybody that we really cannot box this all into a one minute box: honour-based violence, different culture aspects, gender, age, LGBT+ community and all the different things that may occur for individuals experiencing very different things. Poverty, marginalisation and race are issues.

What I would say coming from a perpetrator perspective and working with clients from a perpetrator perspective is that a lot of the work we do in unravelling their abuse and getting to the bottom of it is going back to their childhood. If we are going to prevent and work on protecting children now, we need to listen to those narratives and stories because some of the sexual violence, violence and coercion from their childhoods is horrendous. That is not an excuse. We challenge and we hold to account. However, we really need to listen to that and work with those perpetrators. They do have insight into the impact on the many children who are affected, not just exposed but as victims of their behaviour.

I want to add another point. The Safe and Together model that is run by RISE in Waltham Forest specifically works with social workers and different practitioners, looking at the gaps in that knowledge. I am a social worker myself. I understand that and I understand the pressures, but we really need to start not grouping people into one pot. We need to really think about and use our brains as to what that individual is experiencing and what perpetrators can tell us as well.

Peter Whittle AM: Thank you. Can I ask Danny [Tatlow]? You were talking about older people who suffer domestic abuse. I do know there was a report recently talking about the fact that older people being abused is very seriously underestimated, to the point where people do not know about it.

As a broad rule, I imagine older people just do not use or do not have access to social media. I wonder how, therefore, you get to them when it comes to trying to help. This is a big thing, is it not? How do you get to them?

Danny Tatlow (Research Officer, Action on Elder Abuse): It is tremendously hard, if I am honest. As I mentioned, there are a number of barriers, least of all social norms that many older people grew up with. They

will hide away or they do not want people to find out about them suffering these things. They are worried about social isolation and loneliness. They could consider their abuser still a best friend or a carer.

What you have to try to do is much more, as others have been saying, working together between groups, screening more, especially for older people, at places like the dentist or opticians. Unfortunately, the older you get, domestic abuse moves away from sexual and physical towards economic and psychological. Psychological and economic abuse is sometimes harder to tell, but overall there is a lack of training among practitioners and social workers as to how to tell domestic abuse.

There are ageist stereotypes that come into it as well. There is the idea that because someone is an older person, they are more likely to have bruises anyway, that these are natural, that they might be nervous because they do not get out much and so on. The key thing is to have mentor training that gets past these assumptions that people have about older people.

Peter Whittle AM: Would your remit include people in residential homes?

Danny Tatlow (Research Officer, Action on Elder Abuse): Yes, it would. Action on Elder Abuse does not focus primarily on domestic abuse. We look at elder abuse. There is in the academic literature a bit of contention about the links between domestic abuse and elder abuse, but we look at trust-based relationships rather than gender or power-based with carers, doctors and so on. Domestic abuse does not include doctors and so on, but the remit includes residential homes and nursing homes. The vast majority are in their own homes, but some are still hidden away in residential homes with carers and are not heard enough about.

Peter Whittle AM: Just one final question. When it comes to the abuse of older people, again, we have to be broad in this context, though. We do not have much time. Is there one specific kind of abuse that tends to predominate? Is it physical? You said psychological.

Danny Tatlow (Research Officer, Action on Elder Abuse): It is predominantly psychological and financial, the coercion to try to get money or wills --

Peter Whittle AM: From family members?

Danny Tatlow (Research Officer, Action on Elder Abuse): Family members. Predominantly we deal with sons and daughters and then intimate partners as the main perpetrators. There is sexual and physical as well, but these are maybe 10% of the cases we deal with.

Peter Whittle AM: Thank you very much.

Susan Hall AM: As Len [Duvall AM] said, there were some really interesting points picked up. Thank you.

The one thing that really hits me though is the discussion around men. Whenever I am sitting in meetings like this, it is always about women, which is fine because they are 75% [of victims], but actually 24% or 25% of these victims are men. The provision for them seems absolutely abysmal and men are so often off the agenda completely.

We have a VAWG Strategy. Is there a general thought that there should be a Violence Against Men and Boys Strategy in that event?

Tony Arbour AM: Violence Against People?

Susan Hall AM: Yes. Generally, I would prefer Violence Against People because it is more inclusive, but everybody always shakes their heads and says, “No, it is all specific”. There is such a lack of provision for men.

Ippo Panteloudakis (Head of Services, Respect): We as a sector and you as local elected representatives should all have a good think together about whether VAWG, including men and boys and LGBT+ people, serves the needs of women, men, girls and boys and LGBT+ people. We need to question that, and we need to think what would best serve all those groups’ needs instead. Grouping everything together at this stage does not meet everyone’s needs best. For a lot of men referring to the VAWG Strategy can be offensive when you are a man and you are trying to find services. You find out about the London Mayor’s Strategy, about VAWG or the Government’s VAWG Strategy and you are included in that, you might find it offensive and disengage from the process. It is a similar issue with LGBT+ people. We need to think about it very seriously.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Thank you.

Mark Brooks OBE (Chairman, ManKind Initiative): I would certainly agree with that and just to add that there is a growing body now that accepts the end of VAWG strategy does a brilliant job for women and girls, but men and boys are not women and girls, so we need a parallel strategy. There is a growing number of charities. The former Victim’s Commissioner at the national level also supported a parallel strategy. London would have a great opportunity to take the policy lead in that and we would urge the Assembly and the Mayor to bring that forward.

Florence Eshalomi AM: I wanted to come back to some of the points that Ngozi [Fulani] was mentioning on the facts with regard to black women. One of the areas that was highlighted is the fact that a number of people still do not come forward to report domestic violence. We have been doing some work looking at the relationship with young girls who are involved and coerced by gang members and getting them to recognise that what the boys are doing to them is a form of domestic violence.

What role do you think that the church and the wider black community have to play in being honest about what is going on? There is a silent majority that know there are things going on within the community but refuse to call it out. How do you think the authorities and we can work with some of those areas? No one has mentioned faith yet, which is why I threw that in there.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: That is a good question.

Ngozi Fulani (Founder, Sistah Space): In terms of the church, it has had a dual response. Historically they were telling victims to try to work with their partners, “God will see you through”. We need to revisit the church and its input, because sending somebody back into a relationship and depending on God is not going forward.

In terms of the young people, unfortunately a lot of the young people do not recognise that what is happening is abuse. They have no clue. The parents of the young people, they do not have a clue that their child is involved in gangs. You know the internet can do its own thing. Also, the parents and guardians do not have a clue about domestic abuse. Coupled with that is again why would we go to a system or the police where the response we often get is, “You said that he slapped you. Where is your red mark?” He would have to slap me for my skin to break before you see blood, before you see a red mark. Therefore, we are looking at holistically, why would young people, the very young people, much less older people, go to a system that does not respect them, does not recognise them, does not even see them?

Len Duvall AM: Chair, can I ask a question through you on that session? It was said very appropriately we need to strengthen pathways for children within these situations. Under some of the work the Assembly is

undertaking we have done some previous work, but can we commission practically what we would say if we wanted to recommend a strengthening of what those pathways were? We could bring that back in. We can do this outside the meeting and follow up on that but can we not lose sight of that issue? It has come across very strongly from a number of participants this morning.

Sherry Peck (Chief Executive, Safer London): I just want to say that Safer London prepared a briefing paper around that that is probably about 18 months old, but I can certainly take that up and share it.

Suzanne Jacob OBE (Chief Executive Officer, SafeLives): That is really important. I would pick up from what the colleague from the Women's Trust said about mental health because one of the things that survivors say over and over again - child and adult survivors - is that the mental health impact on children is really severe. You have children with phobias of everything from fruit to blood because of the experiences that they have had, difficult sleeping patterns, difficulty with eating and serious mental health problems when they are very tiny.

The other thing I want to say quickly is that we should not separate adults and children from each other. Adults and children are intimately connected with each other, their experiences are intimately connected, so there is not a choice between what we do for adults and what we do for children. It has to be holistic, recognising how their lives are interwoven.

Joanna Sharpen (Director of Policy and Projects, Against Violence and Abuse): As part of the Domestic Abuse Bill 2019, the children's sector organisations and the women's sector VAWG organisations came together and met regularly and prepared briefings for the Scrutiny Committee for Maria Miller [Member of Parliament for Basingstoke] around what best practice looks like, what children's services should be doing, what is needed, what is out there already, what the gaps are. I am sure there would be documents we would be able to share with you. I took some children to give evidence to that scrutiny committee as well, and that was really powerful, which will be documented already. They are very clearly saying you have to recognise us as children who have experienced abuse at home but also in our own relationships. It took a while to get the Committee to understand that 14-year olds are in abusive relationships. 40% of all of our teenagers are in abusive relationships in this country, and that is inexcusable. We have to listen to their experiences and give them a voice.

Unmesh Desai AM (Chair): Thank you. Let us move on to the second part now. It has been a very helpful discussion so far. I am conscious of the time. We need to finish at 12.00pm but we do not often get a chance to bring people together like we have this morning and so I want to give each and every one of the members the time you feel you need to make a contribution. Again, it would help to introduce yourself for the benefit of people watching via webcast.

We are now going to talk about prevention, and I will oversee the discussion around this session. As well as supporting those who experience domestic abuse, clearly the best solution is to prevent domestic abuse from taking place or recurring. The Mayor has said tackling domestic abuse will form part of his public health approach to reducing violence, and approach that seeks not only to deal with an immediate problem but also look at the underlying factors that lead someone to become a victim or perpetrator of violence. As part of his approach, the Mayor's Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) has committed to ensure that domestic abuse is not eclipsed by focus on street or knife crime, and to provide support for young people who suffer or witness domestic abuse.

What we want to know is what more can be done in this particular space? Is the MPS doing enough and using its powers effectively enough to prevent abuse? We have previously said that the use of the tools given to the MPS such as Domestic Violence Protection Orders and notices are far too patchy. We also know that the use

of the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme - or Clare's Law as it is known - is more in London compared to the average across England and Wales. Why is that? Is enough being done to focus on the offender as well as the victim to ensure that the behaviours of abuse and violence are challenged? With the Domestic Abuse Bill 2019 working its way through Parliament and presenting an opportunity for change, what new or different innovations or practices do we need to see if somebody, for example, is comparing further introduction of a domestic abuse register similar to the sex offenders register? We have a very clear position on that. Would this help your organisation and what difference would it make to both victims and offenders?

It is your session. I do not want to set the parameters for discussion. We want you to tell us in terms of prevention what you want to see from the Mayor and those working with him, how effective could the public health approach be in preventing domestic abuse and helping make this a reality. These are the five points that I hope can guide the discussion

Evan Jones (Head of Community Services, St Giles Trust): Evan Jones from St Giles. MOPAC has done really well in terms of commissioning services in hospitals for victims of extreme violence. We started off in the major trauma centres, we are now in the A&Es. This does tend to pick up the guys, not the women and girls. We accept that one of the places that people will present is health, and that health professionals generally know when something is not right, but they are also quite restricted in what they can do. If a young woman has presented three times in the last four months for emergency contraception to the same clinic, the clinicians almost always know there is something else going on here, this is serious. But if they press the big red safeguarding button, that girl is very likely not to say anything. They need relatable staff available in the hospital who they can talk to.

We have the model here. We have the model that St Giles and Redthread have been delivering around serious youth violence. We could extend that model to include professionals who are particularly good at engaging with young women and girls and get them working across emergency contraception, sexually transmitted infections clinics and the places where the girls who are being abused will show up. Thanks.

Niki Scordi (Chief Executive, Advance): I am Niki Scordi, Chief Executive of Advance. I also learn from what Evan is saying in that there are similar pathways within domestic abuse for women and girls and health settings. For example, we currently have a programme called Pathfinder that we are part of, which is part of a national programme and we are training general practitioners who are in local communities and in general practices to identify abuse, and also to provide some training in terms of how they respond to that. Often people, professionals in particular, might know what is going on or suspect what is going on and they might even ask the question, but what happens after that is the difficulty in that it requires resource to then support a woman or a girl who is unsafe to go home, who might need to be supported immediately. Having domestic abuse workers, whether they are IDVAs or other types of workers, in the right settings, in health settings, in the community as well as in hospitals, but also having access and links to pathways that our workers can provide means that the help is seamless and it feels independent, as well as the authority figures that sometimes people do not choose to engage with as easily.

One other point is around what can we do in terms of prevention. There is a lot we can do in terms of prevention and intervention in training, but [it needs to be] consistent training. It is not about sitting in a classroom and being told what domestic abuse is. But it is being given the confidence to know what to do at that particular point and then what to do next that is best for the survivor in terms of accessing services. The more we can do in building pathways to services and working together to talk about the issue and bring it to the fore, because often domestic abuse is behind closed doors. It is seen as something that happens at home and not to be discussed in public and there is still a great taboo in that. The more we raise awareness about that, the more we make it an OK thing to do, the more we put the blame not on the victim but on the perpetrator, the more we will be able to prevent it in the future. That is still far from the attitude that we see.

Often it is asking why she or he did not leave earlier rather than why the abuse happened in the first place or why did it not stop. The language can change that and will make survivors and victims [feel] able to come forward and it will teach children and young people; and the language in schools will change as a result of that. It goes in terms of the attitudes of society and so there is a lot we can do to continue to change attitudes.

Rachel Nicholas (Head of Service for the London Victim and Witness Service, Victim Support): I am Rachel Nicholas from Victim Support. If we look at domestic abuse as being a public health issue and we look at how much public health is focused on issues that have nothing to do with domestic abuse - diabetes and heart disease, etc - so much more energy goes into those health-related issues, like obesity, than it does to domestic abuse. However, domestic abuse claims so many lives through homicides but also through how we see it affecting us economically, how many workdays are lost as a result of people experiencing domestic abuse and being witness to it; and thinking about how we create generation after generation of victims and perpetrators. We are not doing anywhere near enough to tackle that.

This is more of a personal view than a Victim Support view, because I have worked in this sector a number of decades now, is thinking about how we try to tackle the whole of society's attitudes towards domestic abuse, whether that is a female who is experiencing that, a child or a man. The way that it is displayed within our media. We were talking earlier about how the media talks about knife crime. That is at the top of everything. Niki was talking about it being at the top of the Community Safety Partnership Board meetings. Domestic abuse is completely invisible and we need to make sure that we change that narrative. It is not just about the awareness raising so people know what domestic abuse is and know what services to go to get help. What we need to do is to have that zero tolerance that was talked about many years ago but has never been delivered.

Joanna Sharpen (Director of Policy and Projects, Against Violence and Abuse): I am Joanna Sharpen, Director of Policy at AVA. In terms of prevention, you will know that the Government has said that there must be mandatory sex and relationships education from September next year, with some schools starting this year. Unfortunately, the guidance through a company is somewhat lacking, let's just say. When I was doing a focus group with a group of young girls last week, they were clearly saying, "We really want to learn about relationships and consent", but she said, "At the moment boys are taught about sex and girls are taught about periods and pregnancy and none of us are taught about relationships". They are confused. They are going out into the world not knowing [about relationships]. She said, "I don't want to go out into the world oblivious to these sorts of issues."

You may also be aware that the Home Office every year has run a campaign with TV adverts and so on about teenage relationship abuse since 2010. Originally, part of that website that they have as well had a live-chat facility and a moderated discussion forum that AVA and Respect co-facilitated. In one month when the campaign was live, I spoke personally to 3,000 young people who had seen a 20-second advert on the TV about relationship abuse and were coming on line to say, "This is happening to me. Is this not OK? Is this not normal?" They were disclosing horrific levels of very high-risk sexual abuse, physical abuse, broken bones, attempted strangulation and rape. The average age of these young people was 14. Unfortunately, the Home Office for whatever reason has not carried on with that aspect of the campaign, so now it is just the TV adverts and website with no way of young people coming forward to disclose and get support. That highlighted how prevalent this is and how children are crying out for this information.

We have a website called the Prevention Platform, which all the VAWG sector have signed up to. It is a one-stop shop for anything to do with preventing violence against women and girls. It has free e-learning, loads of websites and toolkits and resources and lesson plans. We are relaunching it on 20 November [2019] and we hope that schools will be able to take this as their platform for what needs to happen in terms of a whole-school approach so that you are not just going in and doing it at assembly but you are embedding it

into the ethos, the policies, the training of the schools, the teachers, the governors, and making sure young people get the education that they are clearly asking for and deserve.

Suzanne Jacob OBE (Chief Executive Officer, SafeLives): Suzanne Jacobs from SafeLives. I want to reinforce the points that colleagues have just made about what young people are searching for. Zohra Khaku, who runs the Muslim Youth Helpline will give you the data from the helpline that shows that young Muslim women reaching out to the helpline, the second highest thing that they were asking about was, "Am I addicted to porn?" The reason that they were asking those questions when you look underneath that headline data is because they did not feel like they understood what a relationship should look like, so they had been looking for answers to that online. What they found, obviously - because when you go down the rabbit hole online this is what you find - was a load of porn. They were worried, because they were watching that, that they had become addicted. There was a whole load of shame attached to that.

We have also just done a piece of engagement work with a number of colleagues supporting in the room, reaching out to men and boys over 11 years old about their attitudes, experiences and behaviours. About 30% of respondents to that, out of about 1,300 responses, said they had done something that they regret in a relationship in the past but that they did not really know what they should do about that. To Joanne's [Sharpen] point, it is both reaching to say, "Is this normal, is this OK if this is happening to me" but also, "Am I allowed to do this? I am a bit worried about my own behaviour."

At the moment if you are worried about your own behaviour but you have not reached the point of putting a label on it, there are very, very, very few places that you could go. If you have hit a certain threshold or if you are perhaps an adult who understands some of these things better, you might call the Respect helpline, but if you are a younger person there really is not anywhere you can go to say, "I am worried about the things I am doing in my relationship." We have to reach those young people at that stage, because when we have spoken to young people, 22% of survivors who we spoke to said their first experience of abuse was in their very first relationship. If this is so prevalent in teen relationships, then both for those who are worried about what they are doing and those who are worried about what they are experiencing, we have to do much better for them.

Amy Kelly (RISE Mutual CIC): Amy Kelly from RISE Mutual. We are thinking about how do we stop domestic abuse and we have talked about perpetrator provision, we have talked about making sure there is sustainable funding. We need to think very clearly about having organisations that do not deliver unsafe practice, thinking about being Respect accredited, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service accredited and thinking about the risk management and how we multiagency work with police, probation and other statutory organisations. Blueprints for best practice when working with perpetrators. If I think of my day-to-day practice within Drive, which is Respect accredited, and think about how I multiagency work from grassroots up, challenging perpetrator work, thinking about Disrupt work with the police, thinking about Domestic Violence Disclosures, thinking about how I challenge the content of dialogue around gender, how these young men as well as adult men talk about women, how they talk about their children and what they are exposed to, what their attitudes to women are and where they come from.

A lot of the work I also do is with children's services and a lot about working with perpetrators about child impact. What has been harmful to them, what do they want for their children, what do they want for their children's futures? Some of these unreachable men - the majority men; we do work with women - have been abused themselves and they have very poor understandings of what is safe and what is unsafe. We absolutely have to embed one-to-one work not just group programmes. Some of these offenders and perpetrators need direct work, individual work.

Sherry Peck (Chief Executive, Safer London): To follow up on that, although that one-to-one work is critical, some very small pieces of our work are working with young men who are displaying harmful sexual

behaviours. It is very difficult. The first thing I would say is we only ever talk about young people because that narrative between victim and perpetrator is unhelpful. If you look at those young men who would be labelled perpetrators, all of them have abuse in their background. However, it is very difficult to get funding for that because it is seen as working with sexual perpetrators.

One of the things that we have seen - and we are working with Dr Carlene Firmin around this - is the impact that peers can have. If you can change the mind of one young man, that young man can go back into the community and be a really good advocate for good among his peers. For me this is one of the issues that we should not lose sight of, the fact that many young people want to make positive change in their community and can do that if they have the right tools but it is really difficult to get funding for that one-to-one work even though there is an evidence base that demonstrates that it will change behaviours.

Peter Kelley (Services Manager, Galop): I am Peter Kelley from Galop. Two very brief points about prevention work in LGBT+ people. There has been a lot of discussion about young people. One of the things we are concerned with is in terms of talking to young people about healthy relationships in school, which is not something our organisation does. However, we have seen in the last year there has been a backlash against LGBT+ education and that intersection with issues around faith and parental things. I am really glad to see that the Mayor of London is standing up for age-appropriate LGBT+ discussions in schools so that teachers, etc, are not scared to even get off the starting block discussing relationships.

There is the point I made earlier as well about how we prevent revictimisation of adults in our communities that we need to see? We totally share the gendered understanding of the proportionality of violence against women and girls but for us with prevention programmes there is very little. Respect, I believe, has started piloting nationally some work but there are not enough prevention programmes or any that really target LGBT+ perpetrators. They are going to go on to reoffend and go from relationship to relationship there.

Amtal Rana (Chief Executive Officer, Kiran Support Services): I am Amtal Rana from Kiran Support Services. We work with women in the Asian community, one of the things I would like to raise here about preventing domestic abuse from happening is about training and awareness raising. When you talk about forced marriages or you talk about honour-based violence, there is a lot of work to be done in our communities and there is a lot of work to be done around making parents -- because we are talking about young people but there is also the element of awareness within certain communities about what is domestic abuse, what is a forced marriage, and making parents aware of that.

Also, when you look at faith, you look at the Muslim community. Although we are an Asian women's organisation, the vast majority of the women using our services are Muslim women. Imams need training. I use the term quite often about 'imported Imams', Imams coming over from India, from Pakistan, from Bangladesh, who do not speak the language of the young people who we work with. There are language issues, there are cultural issues, there are identity issues. Those people coming over will be preaching faith and will be preaching Islam, but they will not be preaching the Islam that I might practise or that the women who come to us practise. It is about having the right people to raise that awareness as well and so having home-grown faith leaders is important. I do not know the answer to all of it, but I do know it is important that we need to work with faith leaders and with parents as well about raising those issues.

Rebecca Lunn (Head of Operations, Suzy Lamplugh Trust): I am Rebecca Lunn from the Suzy Lamplugh Trust. I want to touch on stalking intervention programmes. There is absolutely nothing currently for people who are perpetrating stalking behaviour, which is a massive gap. Although I will also refer to the Stalking Threat Assessment Centre, which is a proof of concept that is currently being managed by the Trust, working with our partners in the MPS, Probation and a mental health trust to look at interventions with perpetrators of stalking, around their mental health, with victim advocacy services running alongside. What we do see is that

there is a large proportion of stalking behaviour and the fixation and obsession can only be properly tackled through mental health interventions. We would advocate for this model that is currently being developed to be looked at more closely and looked to be implemented nationwide.

Mark Brooks OBE (Chairman, ManKind Initiative): I am Mark from the ManKind Initiative. Just a brief point on the healthy relationships in schools. It is important that there is an emphasis on young men and their behaviour, but we need to take a 360-degree view of this to make sure that women also know what a healthy relationship is in terms of their behaviour, not only towards men. We get a lot of young men who call us who in their first relationships have suffered abuse at the hands of their first female partner, but also for women in same-sex relationships as well. It makes the point that healthy relationships should be fully inclusive to make sure that whatever relationships people form they know what the boundaries are and what acceptable behaviour is.

Ngozi Fulani (Founder, Sistah Space): It is a difficult conversation. Firstly, with young people, especially from our African Heritage Community, a lot of damage has been done by the organisations set up to help them. First of all, if you do not understand the culture and you make inappropriate comments about our hair and our skin and what we do or what we like, it focuses on the fact that we are different. Not all young black people are in gangs with knives and sometimes that is the first place organisations go, "Are you in a gang? Are you in a club?" It is about seeing the young person for who they are. That mental health debate is so important for young people because when they feel different -- you will see a lot of our black women going around with wigs and weaves on. Our hair is a very important part of us. A lot of organisations who do not understand us do not understand the significance of our hair and our food. When you see us far to refuges where there are not many African Heritage people, it impacts on our mental health and we return to the abuser.

I want to end by asking the panel one thing. What has the Mayor done - I am not talking about the BAME community because I am not sure what that is - to support the African and Caribbean heritage community? What has the Mayor's Office done for black women and girls specifically from our community? I do not know.

Lyndsey Dearlove (Head of UK Says No More, Hestia): I am Lyndsey from UK Says No More. I am slightly going to move away from children and prevention and speak a little bit to the comments that we have made around the co-ordinated community response. I know that for example in the boroughs that we are currently working in, some of them have Domestic Violence Co-ordinators and some of them share Domestic Violence Co-ordinators with another borough and all but one hold monthly or quarterly co-ordinated response and looking at a VAWG Strategy and how we can respond in the community. In many areas the last place where organisations come together to look at domestic abuse is through our MARACs. In the few that we deliver on, we see a very different response from agencies around the table.

One of the things we would love to see from the Mayor and the Greater London Authority is going back to those organisations and saying that the MARAC [process] is incredibly important, your representation at MARAC is important but also the preparation and the understanding and the purpose of it. We have relied so heavily on the excellent work that MARAC produces that sometimes we have lost the value of it. SafeLives and the work it has done to ensure that they are consistent is running through from the co-ordinators' perspective and obviously the police but it is the people who attend that meeting that is important.

Len Duvall AM: In terms of the trends that you are seeing, is it the fact that the people who are turning up to the meetings are not prepared? Is that because of either the workload or because they are multitasking, they are not just doing this work? Can I get to the bottom of that?

Lyndsey Dearlove (Head of UK Says No More, Hestia): It is difficult to give an absolute answer. The feedback that we get from it is years ago we always spoke about there are people in positions who make things work, but that is quite dangerous because when they move on to something else the person who fills that position may be less interested and the response is different. In many ways I would probably put a lot of it down to that. Agencies are seeing MARAC as a long day that they spend [in the meeting]. Does it serve any purpose? Are we really doing great work in this meeting? Are the right people in this meeting who are able to represent [their organisations]?

Len Duvall AM: Therefore, the ask is to refresh and revive and keep a quality approach to the MARAC system because it has served us well in the past and it goes back to an earlier contribution around this about prioritising risk and managing that risk?

Lyndsey Dearlove (Head of UK Says No More, Hestia): It is, but the thing that we have to recognise is that the MARAC is acting as a space that the domestic violence forums or domestic abuse forums used to deliver in local authorities where we were collectively - between the local authorities and the agencies that were working there, and survivors - talking about what that community needed. That has gone.

The other thing that we need to think about with the MARAC [process] is that right now we do not have a pan-London digital system to support the movement of perpetrators from borough to borough. I recall a time when I was a co-ordinator for a couple of months quite a few years ago and I sat in a meeting in a neighbouring borough. We had a persistent perpetrator who was always present and he disappeared. As a group we wondered what had happened to this person. Three months later I was sitting in a meeting in a neighbouring borough and he was spoken about again. It was only the chance that I was in two meetings that we could put the two pieces together. Is there better work [that could be done] about joining MARACs together?

Len Duvall AM: One more very quick question. Has that changed? We have moved from borough policing to sub-regional, area-type policing with three boroughs grouping together. Has that helped in those types of situations when people have moved or are we losing it slightly? There are still the different approaches. I picked that up earlier on and I still think the police have different approaches in different areas, partly based on experience and some of it based on their priorities, which are misplaced. What is the experience of that in terms of that police reorganisation around this work?

Lyndsey Dearlove (Head of UK Says No More, Hestia): It is difficult. I can only speak for what has been said to me. One of the things that was mentioned to me by a police officer in Harrow when Harrow and Barnet joined together was the distance in travelling from one side to the other of the [BCU to the] Community Safety Unit was nearly a day's work. To visit one person to give that type of support that they would need in order to see the case through by that police officer is impossible.

Suzanne Jacob OBE (Chief Executive Officer, SafeLives): Thank you. I agree with Lyndsey that the MARAC should not be the place where people are trying to do all their co-ordinated community response. That is definitely not what MARAC was set up to do. It had a very defined purpose and Lyndsey [Dearlove] is absolutely right that there are a lot of other things now being brought to that same table because people are very stretched and they do not know where else to have that conversation. That is not to say, of course, that it should sit in isolation from other things. One of the things that has happened since MARAC was created nearly 15 years ago, is we have had a proliferation of multiagency working forums and there is sometimes not a great connection between them. You have a MARAC, you have a Multiagency Safeguarding Hub, you have a Multiagency Public Protection Arrangement (MAPPA) and we now have a VRU. The links between those structures are really important.

There is a point about attendance that is concerning, which is that a number of years ago, the National Probation Service literally told people, "Do not bother to go to this forum anymore unless you have cases". The purpose of MARAC is not to go and just talk about a specific case, it is to share expertise, to make sure that safety planning is really well co-ordinated so that the victim survivor is getting the very best possible co-ordinated response from people. It is not OK for people to opt out in that way. We see the same with adult social care who do not come and mental health services who offer so much crucial expertise but are not regularly there. It is very patchy, as Lyndsey [Dearlove] says.

There was a question from the Chair earlier about perpetrator oversight and a register. At SafeLives we are not supportive necessarily of a register specifically. The Soham case [2002] showed that the police have many, many different registers and databases already and that they do not use them particularly well to co-ordinate the information they need to keep an oversight of a dangerous individual. Yes, absolutely, to more oversight and holding the perpetrator accountable and certainly tracking them across borough boundaries or regional boundaries, absolutely we need to get better at that, but probably not through yet another database.

Amy Kelly (RISE Mutual CIC): I want to comment on the MARAC [process]. We automate our MARAC one week and we have a Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Panel, the following week. I find them fantastic and invaluable. Following on from my colleague from SafeLives, they have to be clear and it has to be about expertise. What happens is sometimes people do not attend and then you do not have that knowledge and expertise and you do not have those checks, and that emphasis has to be placed on them.

I would also agree with my other colleague about a pan-London prevention, and that is certainly what RISE want to put forward in terms of what should happen, so that perpetrator or victim services have a pan-London approach, certainly in the London boroughs. I would certainly say multiagency working is the majority of the work that is going to keep people safe and that has to be strengthened.

Unmesh Desai AM (Chair): Thank you.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chairman): Thank you very much. It has been a fantastic morning. Amy [Kelly], thank you very much also for the work you are doing in Croydon. That last comment took the wind out of my question, which was the pan-London piece, because we want to move towards what we can suggest that the Mayor does around this. We have also talked about different services in different boroughs. We have highlighted the fact that the merging of the boroughs might be deemed an opportunity, but it sounds like it perhaps is not.

I would also like to comment and thank Amtal [Rana] on her comments around the community. In Croydon we started up the Family Justice Centre in the early 2000s, which we are very proud of. One of the challenges was reaching out to the hidden victims of the communities you are dealing with. I know the main mosque in Croydon is working a lot on that.

The point - and it is a reflection - is about the pan-London approach that is coming through, with a consistent borough approach. We hear about good things happening in certain boroughs, which may be high-risk boroughs, but clearly across London we need an approach. I do not want to extend too much on this point, but the Mayor's VRU was mentioned earlier as another layer on existing work. I only want a brief response on that; and I know you will be writing to us later about things you have not been able to mention.

Do you see the Mayor's VRU as an opportunity or is this largely things that you are doing already in that particular field? Is it of help, is there more money heading your way, is this something you are quite excited about? Can I get brief feedback from one or two people, perhaps, or you are quite happy about the whole thing?

Sherry Peck (Chief Executive, Safer London): I do not know about the money but for me it is a positive thing. We can see that in Scotland a VRU had an impact. Hopefully, we can see a similar impact beginning to take off in London. If you know something about money and where it is, great, let us know.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chairman): They do up there.

Sherry Peck (Chief Executive, Safer London): Absolutely, but it can only be a good thing to pull it all together.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chairman): Yes, because it is very much about looking at early experiences, early life experiences, normalised behaviour. It is in that space, is it not? Did you want to comment on that?

Niki Scordi (Chief Executive, Advance): You are right that it is an opportunity and we do see it as such. I would say that the VAWG team within the Mayor's existing setup or structure does a great job and is well connected with the various organisations, women's and other organisations, that work in this space already, so a link between that team and the VRU Strategy would be positive. I know that that is already happening.

There is an opportunity around the narrative and the analysis that is going on. A lot of the organisations have talked about the young people and violence and knife crime and the link between that and domestic abuse. The VRU has a role in changing and influencing that narrative and also in data and analysis. A pan-London approach is quite important but the local provisions are experts in the area that they work in. Also, communities would like to reach to somebody who is near them and who they know. You see that with the Basic Command Units (BCUs) but you also see that with any other initiative that often is an approach of a whole-London approach that does not necessarily respond to the communities' needs. A balance between the two.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chairman): The Committee was quite concerned and wanted to make sure that the VRU did cover domestic violence and we made the point in writing to the Mayor to make sure that that was involved, because initially the signs were that perhaps that was not specific.

Rachel Nicholas (Head of Service for the London Victim and Witness Service, Victim Support): I am aware that there is extra funding as part of the VRU. To pick up a point that was made earlier about making sure that there were different agendas that sit within children safeguarding boards and adult safeguarding boards, your MAPPAs, your MARACs, the VRU, all of those different agendas all need to talk to one another, because what happens is different strategies and different boards sit and talk about the isolated issues and what you find is that domestic abuse is woven into all of them.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chairman): Yes, absolutely. Thank you very much.

Len Duvall AM: Can I come back on to the list issue and lists and what is working and what is not working at the high end? We are told about [Operation] Dauntless Plus, the MPS's operation, and I get the view from the questions we have asked of the MPS that it is pretty patchy. Some [BCUs] are doing it and some are not doing it and that is where it is. In terms of the colleague at the back who said we do not need another list to manage, part of the list that we are trying to promote is putting more pressure on perpetrators about that, particularly where there are crimes where children are involved and where there are second or third offences, to give a much tougher response. Not like Clare's Law, which is great if you ask or friends ask or family ask, but I would put the emphasis on the agencies to go and talk to a potential individual if they are aware of them. However, there have to be some sanctions. I heard someone talk about zero tolerance. If someone does not

tell us that they have established a new relationship or they have not told us where they are living, there has to be a sanction. It cannot go back to the courts, it is just where it is, it has to be treated seriously about that.

We saw when we talked about the list of raising the ante a little bit. We would not dream of taking the pressure on victims and survivors and some of the issues that they have to face. Almost certainly once they have found -- 'courage' is the wrong word. Once they have come to the end of the road and made that decision to talk to someone and come to an agency or even talk to the police -- I have heard how difficult it is for people to talk to the police but people do in that sense. We can never take that full pressure off them, but this is a crime where society does shrug its shoulders somewhat because it never happens to them, or they turn a blind eye because it does not happen. It is something you put up with. We did it in the past and we put up with it. No, we should not, and that is the first point we ought to say.

On the list and the wider issues, are there any other contributions that people would say where a list could do some good or not? I see a much more concentrated case conferencing. Resources have to go with that and follow with that but I am quite happy to hear some of your views about that. I can think of some of the downsides of it as a promoter of it, but I would like to hear some more views from people very quickly. If you cannot do it now, outside the meeting would be welcome.

Suzanne Jacob OBE (Chief Executive Officer, SafeLives): Others may want to comment, but to clarify I was not saying do not do all of the things you have just described, we can do that without a formal register, which is what some organisations have pushed for. I do understand why.

I absolutely think the perpetrators have been completely out of sight for quite a long time. Respect has been doing amazing work for the last 20 years, but almost in isolation with people not really hearing, because there has been this sense that domestic abuse is inevitable and we have to put up with it and get on with it and have a stiff upper lip. I totally agree with you about all of the things that you said, it is just about how we achieve that and whether a register is quite the way to do that. The focus, absolutely.

Unmesh Desai AM (Chair): Three or four questions and points that I want to raise to wrap things up. The point that you made, Amtal [Rana], about Imams from abroad was very interesting because it has been raised in another context of anti-radicalisation programmes. I just make that observation, but I am glad you raised that point.

I want to note that we have a representative of the CPS, Ms Ramsarran [present]. In the earlier session to was Niki [Scordi] who talked about the effectiveness of specialist courts. Could you tell us are there more plans to roll out this programme of specialist courts and what more can be done in terms of legal support for victims?

Lisa Ramsarran (Deputy Chief Crown Prosecutor, London North): We [Crown Prosecutor Service for London North] do have limited numbers of specialist domestic violence courts in London. We do see that they are effective in the support that they provide in terms of the prosecution of cases. There are currently no plans that I am aware of in terms of rolling out further courts but we are working with our partner agencies through the Domestic Abuse Best Practice Framework that draws in experience from a number of different agencies and looks at support that we can provide to survivors, as well as IDVA support, in order to increase outcomes in terms of increasing early guilty pleas and reducing attrition with our survivors who are going through the legal process.

Unmesh Desai AM (Chair): You have been asked about the domestic abusers register. Nottinghamshire [Police] set the lead in this area and record gender-based hate crime. The thinking there is - this is to all of you if you have any observations to make - that if you do not challenge behavioural patterns, it can lead on to the sort of things that we have been talking about. Do any of you have any thoughts about whether the MPS

should be recording gender-based hate crime? To let you know the Commissioner [of Police of the Metropolis] at Committee was very sceptical about the whole idea of recording such crimes but a number of forces, at least five to my knowledge, now have a policy of recording what is called gender-based hate crime. If you do not have any observations or you want to come back to us later, then let us know.

Is there anything that we can learn from other parts of the country or internationally? Again, you can come back to us. Finally, this is about us making recommendations to the Mayor and I know, Ngozi [Fulani], you asked what has the Mayor done, and I hear you. We are not here to speak for the Mayor. We talked about the VRU but is there anything specifically that the Mayor can be doing or should be doing that we can take forward in our recommendations? Again, if you do not have anything to say at this stage --

Evan Jones (Head of Community Services, St Giles Trust): One brief observation. We have heard a lot about commissioning and a lot about diversity. Our organisation bids to MOPAC. We do not get asked about the composition of our workforce. Do we have to have huge monolithic, perhaps not very representative organisations winning contracts, versus small grassroots organisations bidding for contracts? Why can't the bigger organisations, that are perhaps well placed to bid for this stuff, be put under a little bit more pressure to diversify their workforces and justify that as part of the tendering process?

Unmesh Desai AM (Chair): Thank you again for a very interesting discussion. That concludes our discussion here today. Thank you for all your comments and insight into this issue. We will reflect on what we have heard today and use this information to help shape our recommendations to the Mayor, the MPS and MOPAC.

As I mentioned at the start of this morning, please do not worry if you have not had the opportunity to say everything that you wanted to. Our Communications team is here for those who would like to contribute their views, comments and suggestions to a short video that the Committee will put together. We will use this video to help shape our recommendations. If you would like to get involved, please let a member of the team know, who are standing in the Chamber now. Alternatively, you can write to us with any views that you might have.

Finally, I would like to say there are some ideas of how we can continue to work together and share ideas and experiences. As I said earlier, the aim is to represent the voices of Londoners, so we encourage anyone who wants to give us their views to do so. In terms of keeping up to date with what the Committee is doing, meetings are open to the public so you can come and watch the discussions that take place, or you can watch them online on the Assembly website. Anyone can contact the team for more information on a particular topic. We would be happy to send through the reports that the Committee publishes or send you updates on the Committee's upcoming work. Organisations and members of the public are encouraged to get in touch with the Committee about policing and crime in their area and across London. While the Committee cannot intervene in individual cases, what you can tell us can help us to understand emerging and ongoing issues that need to be looked at and what you are most concerned about. We, after all, are here to represent you.

Thank you for your time today.