

MDA No.: 1707

Title: Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 At the Police and Crime Committee meetings on 26 February and 12 March 2025 the Committee resolved that:

Authority be delegated to the Chairman, in consultation with party Group Lead Members, to agree any output arising from the discussion.

- 1.2 Following consultation with party Group Lead Members, the Chairman agreed the Committee's report, 'A New Era': *The impact of violence against women and girls on young people*, as attached at **Appendix 1**.

2. Decision

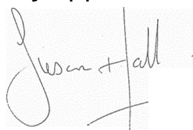
- 2.1 **That the Chairman, in consultation with party Group Lead Member, agrees the Committee's report, 'A New Era': *The impact of violence against women and girls on young people*, as attached at Appendix 1.**

Assembly Member

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

The above request has my approval.

Signature:



Printed Name:

Susan Hall AM, Chairman of the Police and Crime Committee

Date:

28 April 2025

3. Decision by an Assembly Member under Delegated Authority

Background and proposed next steps:

- 3.1 The terms of reference for this investigation were agreed by the Chairman, in consultation with relevant party Lead Group Members, on 27 January 2025 under the standing authority granted to Chairs of Committees and Sub-Committees. Officers confirm that the report and its recommendations fall within these terms of reference.
- 3.2 The exercise of delegated authority approving the report will be formally noted at the Police and Crime Committee's next appropriate meeting.

Confirmation that appropriate delegated authority exists for this decision:

Signature (Committee Services): L J Harvey

Printed Name: Lauren Harvey, Principal Committee Manager

Date: 24 April 2025

Financial Implications: NOT REQUIRED

Note: Finance comments and signature are required only where there are financial implications arising or the potential for financial implications.


Signature (Finance): Not Required

Printed Name:

Date:

Legal Implications:

The Chairman of the Police and Crime Committee has the power to make the decision set out in this report.

Signature (Legal): 

Printed Name: Rory McKenna, Monitoring Officer

Date: 28.04.25

Email: rory.mckenna@london.gov.uk

Supporting Detail / List of Consultees:

- Gareth Roberts AM (Deputy Chair)
- Len Duvall AM
- Zoë Garbett AM

4. Public Access to Information

- 4.1 Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the FoIA, or the EIR and will be made available on the GLA Website, usually within one working day of approval.
- 4.2 If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision (for example, to complete a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary.
- 4.3 **Note:** this form (Part 1) will either be published within one working day after it has been approved or on the defer date.

Part 1 - Deferral:

Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? **NO**

If yes, until what date:

Part 2 – Sensitive Information:

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

Is there a part 2 form? **NO**

Lead Officer / Author

Signature: J Roker

Printed Name: Janette Roker

Job Title: Senior Policy Adviser

Date: 24 April 2025

Countersigned by Executive Director:

Signature:



Printed Name: Helen Ewen

Date: 24 April 2025

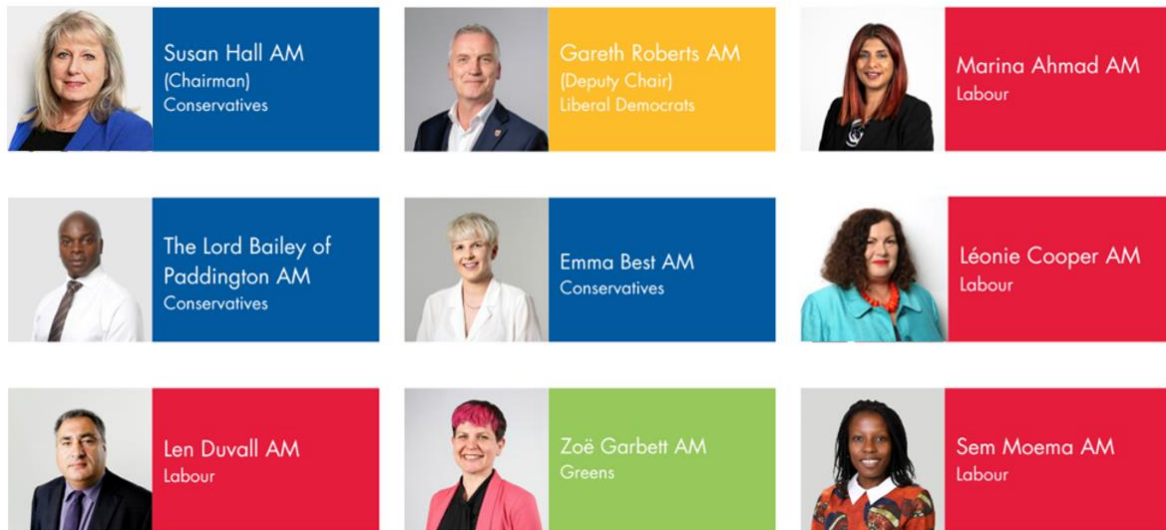
An aerial, top-down view of a city map, likely London, with a green tint. The map shows a dense network of streets and a winding river. Overlaid on the map are several small, realistic images of people walking in various directions, scattered across the city area. The overall composition suggests a focus on urban life and movement.

'A New Era': The impact of violence against women and girls on young people

Police and Crime Committee

LONDON ASSEMBLY

Police and Crime Committee



The London Assembly Police and Crime Committee examines the work of the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) and investigates issues relating to policing and crime reduction in London.

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Foreword



Susan Hall AM
Chairman of the Police and Crime Committee

The scale of the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) epidemic is alarming in its permeation into London society. The increase in physical and sexual violence against women is not only alarming but unacceptable. The Committee through this report establishes a series of recommendations reflecting the extent of the national emergency which is Violence Against Women and Girls.

The Police and Crime Committee heard from an array of experts describing the scale of VAWG in London as ‘endemic’ and that there is a disparity in reporting for VAWG offences. Part of the Committee’s actions to address this underreporting is a Strategic Needs Assessment to examine the extent to which VAWG is prevalent across the 32 London boroughs. This will encompass an examination of the impact of VAWG and overarching misogynistic and harmful views towards women and girls and the subsequent impact these views have on young people.

The Committee has made 8 key recommendations that recognise the impact violence is having on communities within London, strategies to mitigate the exposure of VAWG to young people, understanding of the capabilities for services supporting victims and survivors of VAWG in London, and guidance for parents and teachers.

Our investigation into the extent of which VAWG is prevalent in London’s society and its subsequent impact on young people is concerning, with 90 per cent of girls and 50 per cent of boys receiving explicit pictures, abusers utilising immigration sanctions as a weapon of their abuse, and a lack of positive male role models for young men and boys with online content parroting hateful and misogynistic views without much recourse or challenge.

The Committee has established these recommendations given the scale of VAWG being unprecedented in the capital with an increase of reported sexual offences in London of 7.5 per cent.¹ This report urges the Mayor to take strong and decisive action in establishing a new VAWG strategy to better understand the capacity for victim and survivor organisations as well as establishing priorities in fighting and reporting VAWG.

¹ MPS, [Crime Dashboard](#)

The report further sets out recommendations for the establishment of guidance for schools and parents ensuring that young people have healthy and respectful views of relationships and women in schools and in the home.

The Committee through its investigation spoke to several witnesses who provided expert evidence and insight into the current crisis facing women and girls in London. We would like to thank them for generously giving up their time to support the Committee's work.

Increasing the reporting of VAWG offences is a huge challenge at the start of quelling this epidemic of violence and sexual offences. We hope that the recommendations set out by the Committee are a step forward to help mitigate the impact of VAWG on young people.

Executive Summary

The scale of VAWG in the UK has been described as both a national emergency² and an epidemic.³ The National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC) estimate that one in every twelve women in England and Wales will be a victim of VAWG each year.⁴

The picture of VAWG in London is stark. It was described to us as “endemic.”⁵ In the 12 months to the end of January 2025, reported sexual offences in London have increased by 7.5 per cent and rape has increased by 2.3 per cent, compared to the previous 12 months.⁶

In January 2025, the Committee launched an investigation on how VAWG is impacting young people in London. It set out to examine:

- Young people’s experiences of VAWG in London
- What services are available to support young victims and survivors of VAWG in London
- How the Mayor can ensure that prevention-based education programmes and initiatives are reaching boys and young men in London, particularly around addressing root causes and including misogyny and harmful attitudes to women and girls

The Committee launched its investigation ahead of the Mayor’s publication of his refreshed VAWG strategy later in 2025. The Committee urges the Mayor to take strong action to prevent and tackle VAWG in his refreshed strategy. This report sets out the actions we believe are necessary to strengthen London’s response to VAWG, and prioritise the impact of VAWG on young people, head on. The findings of the Committee’s investigation are set out in detail in this report, and include the following:

- The Committee is concerned by what it found during its investigation. We heard of sexual harassment being common in schools, and of 90 per cent of girls and 50 per cent of boys reporting that they have received explicit pictures or videos of things that they did not want to see.
- There is a need for a Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA) that looks at all aspects of VAWG, including how VAWG affects young people. We believe a VAWG specific SNA would enable a much clearer and more in-depth picture of the current nature of VAWG across all of London’s 32 boroughs.
- Action needs to be taken to prevent abusers from being able to use fear of deportation or immigration sanction as a ‘weapon’ in their abuse. This includes a call for the

² National Police Chiefs’ Council, [Call to action as VAWG epidemic deepens](#), 23 July 2024

³ Mayor of London, [Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls: The Mayor’s VAWG Strategy for London 2022-25](#), 15 June 2022

⁴ National Police Chiefs’ Council, [Call to action as VAWG epidemic deepens](#), 23 July 2024

⁵ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London](#), 12 March 2025, p. 2

⁶ MPS, [Crime Dashboard](#)

implementation of a data firewall, ensuring that data shared between authorities on immigration status contains a safeguarding approach, as an important step in supporting women and girls in vulnerable migrant communities in London to report VAWG and receive the help and support they need.

- Early education and prevention is essential in preventing and tackling VAWG. The Committee heard how the introduction of a School’s Toolkit to enhance the healthy and respectful relationship education taught in schools is having a positive impact. The Committee believes that a parent’s toolkit should be developed as an accompanying resource. It should contain guidance, conversation starting ideas, and ideas for fun and engaging ways for parents to engage their children in conversations about equal, healthy, and respectful relationships.
- Positive male role models for young men and boys are essential. There is a need for further work to promote male role models, as well as positive fatherhood, incorporating lessons from every day real world experience and local communities.
- VAWG support services are under great pressure in London, and unable to meet demand. There is also a need for more services that meet the needs of young people. A detailed plan for sustainable VAWG funding for support services in London, for at least the next three years, is required as part of the Mayor’s upcoming refreshed VAWG strategy.

The Committee makes eight recommendations which are set out below.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

By the end of March 2026, MOPAC, in partnership with London’s Violence Reduction Unit and the Metropolitan Police Service, should undertake a VAWG-specific Strategic Needs Assessment. This should include working with all 32 London boroughs to understand VAWG in local areas, as well as a section on the impact of VAWG on people under the age of 25.

Recommendation 2

The Mayor should work with the Government to lobby social media companies to bring in more effective safeguarding mechanisms to protect children and young people.

Recommendation 3

The Mayor should continue to lobby the Government for the introduction of a National Referral Mechanism along with data sharing initiatives to protect those who are victims of VAWG and ensure they are afforded support akin to the provisions under the Modern Slavery Act for safeguarding victims of modern slavery and human trafficking.

As part of this, the Mayor should host an event at City Hall within the next year bringing together those with lived experience, VAWG sector organisations and international partners with experience of successfully implementing a data sharing initiative or ‘data firewall’ to discuss the implementation challenges and needs such a policy would bring in London.

Recommendation 4

The Government should legislate to introduce a data firewall or data sharing and safeguarding initiative to ensure victims of violence can obtain police assistance despite their immigration status.

Recommendation 5

The Mayor should commission a Parent’s Toolkit to support them in teaching their children about healthy physical and online relationships from a young age, based on the model for the existing School’s Toolkit. This programme must include a consultation process with stakeholders, including young people, teachers, parents and VAWG sector organisations. The Mayor should commission this by 31 December 2025.

The programme should also establish specific mechanisms for ensuring the toolkit is updated at least every six months, to reflect the fast-changing nature of the harmful online environments that promote misogynistic attitudes and ideas.

Recommendation 6

Within the next year, the Mayor should undertake an information campaign uplifting and championing relatable and ‘everyday’ positive male role models, as a counter narrative to the harmful misogynistic content offered by some online influencers.

This programme should link with the VRU’s work around positive fatherhood and male identity.

Recommendation 7

As part of the renewal of the Grassroots Fund, the Mayor should publish a plan and guidance for how organisations who have benefited from the fund can access more sustainable funding sources. Guidance should also include the responsibilities of these organisations to share information with relevant authorities, such as police services, to better encourage reporting of VAWG.

Recommendation 8

As part of his renewed VAWG strategy, the Mayor should publish a fully costed multi-year financial plan for how he will support VAWG sector organisations and review their capacity and capability to deliver services over the next three years. This should be published by 31 December 2025.

An epidemic and a national emergency: levels of VAWG

Introduction

“A New Era.” This was how the current state of violence against women and girls (VAWG) was described to the Committee during its investigation. A regressive “backlash” against feminism, stoked in online forums and on social media away from parental supervision. A “push back” on equality, with boys being “pushed towards a view of what masculinity should be and their perception of what it is young women and girls [can] be to them.”⁷

Data on VAWG is underreported, and the true picture is likely to be much starker than official figures suggest. While police and the wider criminal justice system have a vital role to play in solving this crisis, the Committee heard repeatedly that it is not a problem we can police our way out of. It requires a ‘whole society approach’ to change behaviours and attitudes from a young age if we are going to make London a truly safe city for women and girls.

The Committee is concerned with what it found during its investigation. We heard of sexual harassment being common in schools, and of 90 per cent of girls and 50 per cent of boys reporting that they have received explicit pictures or videos of things that they did not want to see. We heard of a year 4 class (children aged eight and nine) in which most children have access to Tik Tok.⁸

Part of our findings relate to parents and carers, and how they can help protect their children from the bewildering and often frightening online world. The Committee believes the Mayor has a greater role to play in supporting and guiding parents in how to talk to their children about healthy relationships, and that the Mayor should provide a London-wide Parent’s Toolkit to help them address these issues with their children.

Meanwhile, the impact of misogyny is being felt across London. VAWG support services in the city are straining under ever increasing demand - with the Survivor’s Gateway support service for victims of VAWG being paused for new online referrals due to incredibly high demand.

The triple murder in July 2024 of Carol Hunt and her two daughters, Louise and Hannah, is a terrifying example of where misogynistic attitudes and hatred of women and girls can end up in horrific and fatal violence. This awful crime follows the murders of many women killed by men in London, of which only a few make the headlines. For example, Bibaa Henry and Nicole

⁷ London Assembly, Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London, 12 March 2025, p. 2

⁸ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 2](#), 26 February 2025, p. 2

Smallman in July 2020, Sarah Everard in March 2021, Maria Rawlings in May 2021, Sabina Nessa in September 2021, and Elianne Andam in 2023, all women in London murdered by men.

The Mayor’s VAWG strategy

The Mayor published his current VAWG strategy on 15 June 2022. The strategy runs from 2022-25, with an updated strategy due to be published at some point in 2025.⁹ The current strategy is based around four key priority areas for tackling VAWG:

- Preventing and reducing VAWG
- Supporting all victims and survivors
- Holding perpetrators to account
- Building trust and confidence

The delivery of the strategy is overseen by the London VAWG Board, which includes members from MOPAC, the Met and VAWG sector organisations.

The Mayor has said that he will publish a refreshed VAWG strategy in 2025, although the date of publication has not yet been confirmed. At the Committee’s meeting on 29 January 2025, the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime, Kaya Comer-Schwartz, confirmed that when the draft Police and Crime Plan is finalised MOPAC will “move on to working on the VAWG strategy”.¹⁰

The scale of VAWG

The UN defines VAWG as:

“Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”¹¹

⁹ [The previous strategy covered 2018-21.](#)

¹⁰ Police and Crime Committee, Q&A meeting – transcript, 29 January 2025

¹¹ UN Women, [Frequently asked questions: Types of violence against women and girls](#), 27 June 2024

The scale of VAWG in the UK has been described as both a national emergency¹² and an epidemic.¹³ The National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC) estimate that one in every twelve women in England and Wales will be a victim of VAWG each year.¹⁴

The vast majority of VAWG is perpetrated by men and boys against women and girls. Crimes that fall under the umbrella term VAWG include rape, sexual assault, domestic abuse, stalking and sexual harassment, as well as honour-based crimes.¹⁵

The term VAWG is often used interchangeably with the term ‘gender-based violence’. It is widely recognised by academics and campaign groups that VAWG occurs due to the unequal distribution of power in society between women and men.¹⁶

Levels of VAWG in London have been increasing in recent years. It was described to us as “endemic.”¹⁷ In the 12 months to the end of January 2025, reported sexual offences in London have increased by 7.5 per cent and rape has increased by 2.3 per cent, compared to the previous 12 months.¹⁸

Table 1: Police recorded VAWG offences in London

	March 2023- February 2024	March 2024- February 2025	Percentage change	
Domestic abuse	96,196	86,863	-9.7%	
Sexual offences	24,383	26,164		7.3%
Rape	8,868	9,007		1.6%
Other sexual offences	15,515	17,157		10.6%

Source: [Monthly Crime Data New Cats | Tableau Public](#), accessed on 26 March 2025¹⁹

A crucial issue for young people

The Committee is particularly concerned about the impact of VAWG on young people. It is becoming increasingly apparent that young people are affected by direct experiences of VAWG, both as victims and as perpetrators, yet no specific data is regularly reported or published.

¹² National Police Chiefs’ Council, [Call to action as VAWG epidemic deepens](#), 23 July 2024

¹³ Mayor of London, [Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls: The Mayor’s VAWG Strategy for London 2022-25](#), 15 June 2022

¹⁴ National Police Chiefs’ Council, [Call to action as VAWG epidemic deepens](#), 23 July 2024

¹⁵ House of Lords Library, [Tackling violence against women and girls in the UK](#), 22 June 2023

¹⁶ Scottish Women’s Rights Centre, [What is gender-based violence?](#)

¹⁷ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London](#), 12 March 2025, p. 2

¹⁸ MPS, [Crime Dashboard](#)

¹⁹ Rape and other sexual offences are subsets of the sexual offences category.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has found that adults aged 16 to 24 years are more likely to be victims of sexual assault than other age groups.²⁰ The youth charity, Youth Endowment Fund, report that 16-19 years old is the most common age of offenders of rape and serious sexual offences.²¹

The Committee heard that 16- to 25-year-olds are the most at risk of domestic abuse, and that harassment is common in London’s schools.²² This is particularly concerning given the reduction of Safer Schools Officers, as this reduction is a further barrier to reporting VAWG. The recent Netflix drama ‘Adolescence’ painted a shocking portrait of a 13-year-old male perpetrator of VAWG, radicalised by misogyny online, and the subsequent impact on the family and wider community.

In 2023, End Violence Against Women (EVAW), a coalition of 163 specialist support services, researchers, activists, victim-survivors and NGOs working together to end VAWG,²³ conducted survey work on girls’ experience of harassment in schools. It found:

- Nearly one-third of girls surveyed don’t feel safe from sexual harassment in school.
- 62 per cent of girls surveyed were made to feel uncomfortable about their appearance and 26 per cent of those girls said it was a teacher who had made the comments.
- Nearly a quarter (24 per cent) of girls in mixed sex schools said they had experiences of unwanted sexual touching in school.²⁴

The Girls’ Attitudes Survey 2024, run by youth organisation Girlguiding, surveyed over 2,500 girls and young women aged 7-21. It found that girls’ and young women’s mental health and wellbeing has significantly worsened in recent years. It also found that:

- Three in four girls aged 11-16 see or experience sexism. This increases to 95 per cent for young women aged 17-21.
- 77 per cent of girls and young women aged 7-21 have experienced online harm in the last year.
- Almost one in three girls and young women aged 11-21 are worried about not being treated fairly or respectfully in the future because they’re a girl or woman.²⁵

In addition, a recent survey conducted by Sky News found that over half (55 per cent) of 1,000 students surveyed had seen sexually explicit or violent content that was inappropriate for their age.²⁶

²⁰ Office for National Statistics, Sexual offences victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2022, 23 March 2023

²¹ Youth Endowment Fund, [Preventing Violence Against Girls, and Women](#), 25 November 2024

²² London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 1](#), 26 February 2025, p. 3

²³ [EVAW](#)

²⁴ End Violence Against Women, [It’s #AboutTime A Whole School Approach to Ending Violence Against Women & Girls](#), 12 June 2023

²⁵ Girlguiding, [Girls’ Attitudes Survey 2024](#)

²⁶ Sky News, [Teenagers exposed to ‘horrific’ content online – and this survey reveals the scale of the problem](#), 19 March 2025

The Committee heard about the challenges and experiences of young people and VAWG in London. Janaya Walker, Head of Public Affairs at EVAW, told the Committee:

“The experience of sexual harassment tends to be experienced more disproportionately by younger age groups. There was a report by Forward UK just in October last year [2024], which found that eight in ten young women in London faced sexual harassment and sexual assault in the last two years.

That matches up with the broader research that is done by the Office for National Statistics, which also found that reports of sexual harassment and assault are most common among the younger age groups. When we take into account what is happening online, it is a similar picture. There was a large study done by the Open University and it found that women experiencing online violence are also more likely to be under the age of 25 for that category.”²⁷

As part of its investigation the Committee received evidence from the London Youth Assembly (LYA). The LYA highlighted the harmful influence of misogynistic online content on young people:

“The influence of harmful online communities and influencers is viewed as contributing to the growing gender divide, fostering an environment where boys perceive dominance over girls as a form of power, and where girls are seen as the ‘enemy.’ This deepens toxic attitudes and creates barriers to meaningful change.

The prevalence of anti-women content online is particularly concerning, as young people, still in the process of developing their own identities, may struggle to navigate these harmful influences and form balanced perspective.”²⁸

Data on young people and VAWG

The reality of increased levels of VAWG in London is not reflected in available data, as it is widely recognised that VAWG is an underreported crime. It is vital that women and girls feel able to report instances of VAWG and harassment, as well as unwanted and misogynistic behaviours, and to seek help if they are the victim of domestic abuse. The underreported nature of the data on VAWG suggests that there are many young women and girls who do not feel able or safe to seek help and support. Young women’s advocacy charity, the Young Women’s Trust, has found that one in four young women would be reluctant to report sexual harassment

²⁷ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 1](#), 26 February 2025, p. 1-2

²⁸ Written evidence received from the London Youth Assembly

at work for fear of losing their job.²⁹ In addition, some girls and young women may not see some instances of VAWG as a crime, and therefore not worth reporting.

It is widely agreed by VAWG sector organisations that police recorded instances of VAWG will be much lower than the actual total, and that underreporting remains a major issue. EVAW has said in a report on VAWG and the criminal justice system: “We know that the majority of VAWG is unreported, therefore this data is likely just the tip of the iceberg.”³⁰ During its investigation, the Committee heard repeatedly that VAWG is underreported, therefore recorded crime is not a holistic reflection of the nature of VAWG in London.

Part 1 of the Angiolini Inquiry into the murder of Sarah Everard by serving Met Officer Wayne Couzens found evidence of low levels of reporting in instances of indecent exposure, a crime that may “indicate a potential trajectory towards even more serious sexual and violent offending.”³¹ It recommended that police services should address deep-seated cultural barriers to reporting.³² The Report states:

“Victims cited similar reasons for not reporting, including, but not limited to, the lack of a confidential and supportive route for making a report, the fear of being disbelieved or the potential to be ostracised[...].”³³

A 2025 report from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) also found that while the Met had made improvements in how it reports sexual exploitation of children, there were still cases where reporting was flagged as criminal rather than sexual exploitation.³⁴

Deputy Assistant Commissioner Alexis Boon, the Met, said:

“VAWG is underreported across all different age ranges and all different communities. In the first instance, success is seeing an increase in reporting, so that we can tackle it more effectively and deal with the underlying causes. Of course, over time, we want to see – as we get the increase in reporting, we then reduce off the back of that. We see it like a bell curve in some ways that we want to increase reporting to then reduce, but in the first instance we want to get more reporting and we need to encourage that.”³⁵

Data specifically related to young people’s experience of VAWG is also limited. For example, the Home Office uses estimates from the Crime Survey for England and Wales to measure

²⁹ Young Women’s Trust, [1 in 4 young women fear being fired for reporting sexual harassment](#), 14 October 2019

³⁰ End Violence Against Women, [New NPCC VAWG report highlights need to transform the criminal justice system](#), 18 May 2023

³¹ [The Angiolini Inquiry: Part 1 Report](#), February 2024, p. 7

³² [The Angiolini Inquiry: Part 1 Report](#), February 2024, p. 15

³³ [The Angiolini Inquiry: Part 1 Report](#), February 2024, p. 48

³⁴ HMICFRS, [The Metropolitan Police Service’s handling of the sexual and criminal exploitation of children Causes of concern – revisit](#)

³⁵ London Assembly, Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London, 12 March 2025, p. 3

prevalence of VAWG. However, this does not include children under the age of 16.³⁶ This means it is harder for VAWG sector organisations, as well as the Mayor, to understand the needs of young people who are affected by VAWG.

Understanding the nature of VAWG in London

To map and target support services in London, and to ensure that young women and girls are getting the help and support they need, it is essential that organisations commissioning support services have a deep and thorough understanding of the nature of VAWG across the city.

In 2020, the Mayor’s Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) carried out a Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA) on violence across London, as part of its statutory duties under the Serious Violence Duty.³⁷ The VRU receives additional funding from the Home Office to deliver the Serious Violence Duty, which totalled £2.5m of Home Office funding between 2022 to 2025.³⁸

The VRU’s original SNA, published in January 2020, presented an analysis of violence across London. It defined violence as “interpersonal forms of violence between family members, intimate partners, friends, acquaintances and strangers, including youth violence, intimate partner violence and sexual violence.” It included the following offences:

- all violence against the person offences (homicide, violence with injury, and violence without injury)
- sexual assaults (rape and other sexual offences)
- robbery.³⁹

Domestic violence was also included in the SNA, as a type of violence. Lib Peck, told the Committee that the SNA was the VRU’s “way of looking at the assessment of violence across London” and “it was agreed then across London that the focus should be on sexual violence and domestic abuse.”⁴⁰

The original SNA provided a useful insight into the nature of domestic abuse and sexual violence in London, including a specific section on programmes addressing domestic violence perpetrators.⁴¹ However, it only focused on specific sections of VAWG, and does not provide a deeper understanding of the whole VAWG picture across London. Lib Peck told us that the current SNA is not “sufficient to be able to give us enough of a picture around VAWG”.⁴²

³⁶ National Audit Office, [Tackling violence against women and girls](#), 31 January 2025, p. 7

³⁷ A duty placed on local authorities by the Police, Crime, Sentencing And Courts Act 2022 to collaborate with the other specified authorities for that same area to prevent and reduce serious violence.

³⁸ [PCD 1365 Home Office Serious Violence Duty](#), 6 October 2023

³⁹ Violence Reduction Unit, [Violence in London: what we know and how to respond](#), 31 January 2020

⁴⁰ London Assembly, Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London, 12 March 2025, p. 22

⁴¹ Violence Reduction Unit, [Violence in London: what we know and how to respond](#), 31 January 2020, p. 60

⁴² London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London](#), 12 March 2025, p. 24

This was echoed by Janaya Walker from EVAW, who also highlighted a problematic reliance on police data. She told us that the most recent SNA “only captures domestic abuse and sexual violence, and it is quite limited in the types of data that it uses. It relies quite heavily on police data, which we know is not an accurate representation of what is happening.”⁴³

Similarly, Jain Lemom from MOPAC explained the importance of looking at the “breadth” of VAWG. She told the Committee:

“The focus when we talk about VAWG is people just talk about DA [domestic abuse] and sexual violence and it is good to see that people are understanding that there is a breadth to this. I really do not want any of the harmful practices to get lost. Prostitution never gets talked about and there are women that are really suffering underneath, crimes associated with prostitution. In your work as Assembly Members, if you are looking at tackling VAWG, I would urge you to look across the breadth of VAWG to make sure that you are really examining all aspects.”⁴⁴

The Committee heard about the need for a VAWG specific SNA. Lib Peck told us that an SNA that is “looking at all the factors around VAWG” is something that the VRU, and partners, have “called for repeatedly”.⁴⁵ This was supported by Janaya Walker, EVAW, who said: “a clear recommendation would be for there to be a strategic needs assessment across London which captures all forms of VAWG and not only domestic abuse and sexual violence”.⁴⁶

The Committee believes that a VAWG specific SNA would also allow MOPAC and the VRU, as well as VAWG sector organisations, to target support services where they are most needed. Janaya Walker, EVAW illustrated this to the Committee:

“[We do] not [have] that strategic needs assessment of all forms of VAWG in London. We have indicators of it in terms of the demand that the services that do exist are saying we are unable to support survivors at age 11 who come to us, or our waiting lists are huge, or we can only do crisis support, we cannot do longer-term support, but we do not have an overall picture in the way that we would like. That is something that we think is very important.”⁴⁷

⁴³ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 1](#), 26 February 2025, p. 3

⁴⁴ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London](#), 12 March 2025, p. 46

⁴⁵ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London](#), 12 March 2025, p. 24

⁴⁶ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 1](#), 26 February 2025, p. 3

⁴⁷ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 1](#), 26 February 2025, p. 14

The Committee asked guests whether a VAWG specific SNA should have a section focusing on the needs of young people. Lib Peck told us this wasn't necessary, and that a VAWG specific SNA across all age groups, including young people, would be sufficient.⁴⁸

The Committee agrees with the need for an assessment that looks at all aspects of VAWG. We believe a VAWG specific SNA would enable a much clearer and more in-depth picture of the current nature of VAWG across all of London's 32 boroughs. We believe that it should include all VAWG, not just domestic and sexual violence, but also, for example, harassment, stalking, and women's safety in public places, as well as online and tech enabled VAWG. Given the increased threat from online and tech enabled VAWG faced by people under 25, the Committee also believes that a VAWG-specific SNA should include a specific focus on the needs of young people.

Recommendation 1

By the end of March 2026, MOPAC, in partnership with London's Violence Reduction Unit and the Metropolitan Police Service, should undertake a VAWG-specific Strategic Needs Assessment. This should include working with all 32 London boroughs to understand VAWG in local areas, as well as a section on the impact of VAWG on people under the age of 25.

Recommendation 2

The Mayor should work with the Government to lobby social media companies to bring in more effective safeguarding mechanisms to protect children and young people.

Supporting young women to report VAWG

The Committee heard that reluctance to report VAWG is a particular problem for young women and girls from migrant and minoritized communities in London. This can be worsened if the victim also has no recourse to public funds.⁴⁹ A major fear for young women in this situation is data sharing between the police and the Home Office on immigration status. The Committee heard that this can not only be a deterrent from reporting abuse, but it can also be "weaponised" by the abuser. Sanskriti Sanghi, from the VAWG campaign group and charity Southall Black Sisters, told us that "All police forces in England and Wales routinely share immigration data of victim survivors with immigration enforcement. This creates a weaponised

⁴⁸ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London](#), 12 March 2025, p. 22

⁴⁹ A person subject to immigration control who cannot claim public funds (including benefits and housing assistance), unless an exception applies (Source: NRPF Network, [Who has no recourse to public funds \(NRPF\)?](#))

fear of deportation that prevents women and girls from coming forward.”⁵⁰ Janaya Walker, EVAW, added:

“[Immigration data sharing is] a real barrier for people to come forward with a worry that they are not going to be treated as victims and survivors, they are going to be treated as potential immigration offenders. That creates a climate as well for those who are doing the harm because they know that there is almost a climate of impunity that, ‘If there are certain women that I were to mistreat and abuse, there is nothing they can do about it’.”⁵¹

Previous media reporting has indicated that the Met makes the most referrals of victim data to immigration enforcement out of all police services in England.⁵² While this may partly be because the Met is many times larger than any other police service, it is still concerning in the context of VAWG. Former Met officer, David Carrick, who was jailed in February 2023 after being found guilty of raping and sexually assaulting multiple women over a 17-year period, used fear over immigration reporting to control and coerce one of his victims.⁵³

There are many victim survivors of sexual assault that are not even being able to come forward and the demand that we are seeing is probably just a fraction of what the demand is, because structural barriers are preventing women from coming forward in the first place. That goes to the issue of underreporting as well [...] that especially migrant women, for instance, with insecure immigration status would not be reflected in any statistics because it is very unlikely that they are coming forward at all and their invisibilisation needs to be factored into what more needs to be done and how they need to be supported as well.”⁵⁴

Sanskriti Sanghi, Southall Black Sisters

A data firewall

Many VAWG organisations⁵⁵ have called for a ‘data firewall’ to prevent the immigration data of those coming forward seeking help from violence and abuse being shared with immigration

⁵⁰ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 1](#), 26 February 2025, p. 2

⁵¹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 1](#), 26 February 2025, p. 5

⁵² The Guardian, [UK police reported sexually exploited children to immigration enforcement](#), 5 March 2023

⁵³ Domestic Abuse Commissioner, [Safety before status: How to ensure the Victims and Prisoners Bill meets the needs of all victims](#), 2023

⁵⁴ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 1](#), 26 February 2025, p. 19

⁵⁵ Organisations that have called for some sort of data firewall include: [Liberty](#), [the Chartered Institute of Housing](#), [EVAW](#), [the Latin American Women’s Rights Service](#), and [Southall Black Sisters \(alongside 69 other organisations\)](#)

enforcement authorities. Considering information sharing initiatives also being used effectively to combat high harm offenders the police must strike the correct balance to ensure their responsibilities or protecting the public and responsibilities in sharing information to the Home Office regarding high harm offenders particularly V100 suspects who are the top 100 VAWG offenders by force.

Calls for a firewall go back several years. In 2018, the campaign groups Liberty and Southall Black Sisters submitted a ‘super-complaint’⁵⁶ to His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS). This included a specific complaint about “the passing of victim and witness data to the Home Office by the police for immigration enforcement purposes”.⁵⁷

The Dutch ‘Free In, Free Out Policy’

The Netherlands’ ‘free in, free out’ policy is the most prominent example of a ‘firewall protection’ policy in Europe. The policy began as a local pilot project in the city of Amsterdam and was introduced nationally in 2015 alongside the implementation of the Victims’ Directive. The ‘free in, free out’ policy exists as a largely informal arrangement that allows migrants with irregular status to freely enter a police station to report a crime and be permitted freely to leave without being arrested or held in custody.⁵⁸ It has been described as an ‘important first step’ in ensuring safe reporting but does not explicitly forbid regular police officers from contacting the immigration police.⁵⁹

Evaluation of the policy by the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford found that while there was still “ongoing inconsistency in implementation at the local level,” it remained an “important public safety measure.”⁶⁰

HMICFRS’ response to the complaint found that the sharing of such information was a feature of policing, and that “in some cases, this information may be used for immigration enforcement purposes”.⁶¹ It recommended the Home Office should undertake a review “to establish safe

⁵⁶ A system for police complaints introduced by the Police Reform Act 2002, which allow bodies to raise issues or concerns on behalf of the public about a feature or features of policing in England and Wales, which is, or appears to be, significantly harming the interests of the public.

⁵⁷ College of Police, HMICFRS and the IOPC, [Safe to share? Report on Liberty and Southall Black Sisters’ super-complaint on policing and immigration status](#), 17 December 2020, p. 23

⁵⁸ Global Exchange on Migration & Diversity, [Safe Reporting of Crime for Victims and Witnesses with Irregular Migration Status in the Netherlands](#), September 2019

⁵⁹ COMPAS, [Free in, free out: Dutch policy marks an important first step toward firewall protection for irregular migrants in Europe](#), 3 November 2020

⁶⁰ COMPAS, [Free in, free out: Dutch policy marks an important first step toward firewall protection for irregular migrants in Europe](#), 3 November 2020

⁶¹ College of Police, HMICFRS and the IOPC, [Safe to share? Report on Liberty and Southall Black Sisters’ super-complaint on policing and immigration status](#), 17 December 2020, p. 77

reporting mechanisms for all migrant victims and witnesses”. On the introduction of a firewall, HMICFRS said:

“[The Home Office] should determine a working definition of a firewall in this context with reference to the conclusions of this report, international examples of such practice and any relevant academic research. The review should identify the correct basis on which any proposed firewall should be implemented.”⁶²

The Home Office published its review in December 2021, as recommended by HMICFRS.⁶³ It did not endorse the creation of a firewall, but pledged to introduce an ‘Immigration Enforcement Migrant Victims Protocol’.^{64 65} In the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, it also committed to establishing a statutory code of practice that would “provide guidance on the circumstances when data sharing would or would not be appropriate and will provide transparency around how any data shared will be used.”⁶⁶ As of March 2025, it does not appear that either the code of practice or the protocol have been published. Moreover, guidance on how information sharing with the Home Office in relation to the firewall is necessary as to not undermine the statutory obligations of the police for cases such as children. Working Together to Safeguard Children notes the statutory duty of the police to share information to relevant authorities regardless of immigration status.⁶⁷ A ‘firewall’ may undermine this statutory obligation.

In November 2023, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner (DAC) for England and Wales, Nicole Jacobs, joined calls to improve public safety and provide better support for migrant victims and survivors of VAWG. She highlighted that “victims of crime with insecure immigration status do not report domestic abuse to the police or other statutory services due to the fear that their information will be passed onto Immigration Enforcement, and that the reported crime(s) will not be investigated.”⁶⁸ The DAC called on the Home Secretary to “establish a data-sharing firewall between Immigration Enforcement and statutory services, including the police, so that migrant victims and witnesses can safely report domestic abuse and other crimes.”⁶⁹

⁶² College of Police, HMICFRS and the IOPC, [Safe to share? Report on Liberty and Southall Black Sisters’ super-complaint on policing and immigration status](#), 17 December 2020, p. 87

⁶³ Home Office, [Home Office and Police data sharing arrangements on migrant victims and witnesses of crime with insecure immigration status](#), December 2021

⁶⁴ Home Office, [Home Office and Police data sharing arrangements on migrant victims and witnesses of crime with insecure immigration status](#), December 2021

⁶⁵ This protocol, had it been published, would have “set out that no immigration enforcement action will be taken against that victim while investigation and prosecution proceedings are ongoing, and the victim is receiving support and advice to make an application to regularise their stay.” It would also “set out what information and signposting immigration enforcement could offer to migrant victims to help them regularise their stay and thereby reduce the threat of coercion and control by their perpetrators.” (Source: Home Office, [Home Office and Police data sharing arrangements on migrant victims and witnesses of crime with insecure immigration status](#), December 2021, p. 14)

⁶⁶ The code of practice (Source: [Letter from the Minister of State for Victims and Safeguarding to the Chair of the Commons Home Affairs Committee](#), 29 February 2024)

⁶⁷ Data Sharing Standard from the Home Office Page 8 [Data-sharing-standards-of-op-practice-v1.pdf](#)

⁶⁸ Domestic Abuse Commissioner, [Letter to the Home Secretary](#), 9 November 2023

⁶⁹ Domestic Abuse Commissioner, [Letter to the Home Secretary](#), 9 November 2023

The Committee heard that MOPAC has also been working with the Met to move this forward. Jain Lemom, MOPAC, told us:

“We have advocated for a number of years the necessity for a firewall because we have anecdotal information about women who are deliberately just not going to the police, just not reporting, not only to the police, they do not want to go to social services, they do not want to go anywhere because they are so frightened about being outed in terms of their immigration status.”⁷⁰

Jain Lemom, MOPAC, told us of the positive work MOPAC has been undertaking with international partners:

“We have been having conversations for quite a few years now, trying to move this forward, to the extent that I have had conversations with international partners because there are good examples across the world – not loads of them – but good, solid examples that you can reach into, get information from, and see how that can be translated across to the London experience.”⁷¹

The Committee urges the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime to fulfil his promise of lobbying the government to implement a data firewall or other data sharing initiative.⁷² The Committee also urges the Mayor to continue to use his convening power and influence to draw public attention to this issue, and bring partners and stakeholders on board. Highly visible campaigning will also provide reassurance to young women and girls that are fearful of reporting violence and abuse due to concerns about immigration data sharing.

However, data sharing of immigration status may be required for some VAWG suspects. In a domestic violence situation, the immigration status for both parties may be questionable and as such a lack of information sharing will hinder immigration enforcement removing dangerous offenders from the UK.

The Committee explored the introduction of a data firewall with the Met. National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC) guidance on sharing police data with the Home Office states:

“The role of the police includes protecting life and property, bringing offenders to justice, preventing the commission of offences, preserving order and the protection of vulnerable people. It also includes the enforcement of immigration law and assisting the Home Office in enforcement of immigration law [...] Sharing information on an individual may assist the police and Home Office in the discharge of their respective functions.”⁷³

⁷⁰ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London](#), 12 March 2025, p. 8

⁷¹ London Assembly, Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London, 12 March 2025, p. 8

⁷² MOPAC, [The Mayor’s VAWG Strategy 2022-25](#)

⁷³ [Information sharing with the Home Office](#)

The guidance also provides the police with discretion to decide when to share information.⁷⁴ As described by the Home Office:

“The guidance requires officers to take a proportionate approach when considering the appropriateness and timeliness of sharing information, emphasising the need in some instances to prioritise immediate measures to protect the victim/witness over sharing information. Information should be shared accordingly once that need for immediate protective measures no longer applies.”⁷⁵

The Committee asked the Met about the work it is doing to ensure migrant victims and witnesses of VAWG feel confident to come forward and report to the police. The Met told us that it “has been working at the forefront of some developments that are taking place nationally with the NPCC lead in this area”.⁷⁶

DAC Alexis Boon added that he recognised that the NPCC policy needs to be reviewed, and that “it needs a clearer position for policing generally. We have just got to work that through, but it is just getting an arrangement that gives people confidence, that supports what we are trying to do, and supports our primary objectives.”⁷⁷ He said:

“We need to come to some arrangements that give people confidence to come forward. We are absolutely clear that, if you are coming forward and you are reporting a rape, that is the most important thing to deal with and protect you, to look after you, to support you, to make sure that the person that has perpetrated that against you is brought to justice. We are really clear that is our primary goal and aim.”⁷⁸

DAC Boon also told the Committee that it is not an issue that “policing can solve entirely on its own.”⁷⁹ The Committee heard that the Met has been “having those conversation” and working with stakeholders to determine how it can work its “way around this really difficult problem, and make some recommendations and support the national work”.⁸⁰ He said:

“We have done some thinking and some work with stakeholders in London but repeatedly the people in the VAWG sector, survivors, victims are telling us this is an issue. We do recognise it and we are going to try to work with it, but we need to work with the NPCC nationally and with Government to resolve this. This is not something that we can resolve

⁷⁴ [Information sharing with the Home Office](#)

⁷⁵ [Review of data sharing: migrant victims and witnesses of crime \(accessible version\) - GOV.UK](#)

⁷⁶ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London](#), 12 March 2025, p. 6

⁷⁷ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London](#), 12 March 2025, p. 8

⁷⁸ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London](#), 12 March 2025, p. 8

⁷⁹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London](#), 12 March 2025, p. 7

⁸⁰ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London](#), 12 March 2025, p. 7

overnight, but we absolutely recognise the importance and the part that plays in people coming forward, or people having that confidence to report, but it is on our priority list.”⁸¹

The Committee believes that action needs to be taken to prevent abusers from being able to use fear of deportation or immigration sanction as a ‘weapon’ in their abuse. Considerations should be made to provide the same protections of those who are victims of modern slavery or human trafficking such as the National Referral Mechanism providing support to VAWG survivors and mitigate the reporting barrier that immigration status has on victims.

The Modern Slavery Act: National Referral Mechanism

The Modern Slavery Act allows for a competent authority to decide that a potential victim of modern slavery who may have insecure immigration status will have a delay of 30 days where they cannot be removed from UK.

Those with a positive reasonable grounds decision must then wait for the competent authority to make a conclusive grounds decision on their case. Subject to certain exceptions, people with a positive reasonable grounds decision are eligible for a reflection and recovery period of at least 30 days or until they receive their conclusive grounds decision. During this time, they cannot be removed from the UK. In practice, average waiting times for conclusive grounds decisions are considerably longer than 30 days.

We join the calls for a firewall or other data sharing and safeguarding initiative to be implemented, as an important step in supporting women and girls in vulnerable migrant communities in London to report VAWG crimes.

Recommendation 3

The Mayor should continue to lobby the Government for the introduction of a National Referral Mechanism along with data sharing initiatives to protect those who are victims of VAWG and ensure they are afforded support akin to the provisions under the Modern Slavery Act for safeguarding victims of modern slavery and human trafficking.

As part of this, the Mayor should host an event at City Hall within the next year bringing together those with lived experience, VAWG sector organisations and international partners with experience of successfully implementing a data sharing initiative or ‘data firewall’ to discuss the implementation challenges and needs such a policy would bring in London.

⁸¹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London](#), 12 March 2025, p. 6-7

Recommendation 4

The Government should legislate to introduce a data firewall or data sharing and safeguarding initiative to ensure victims of violence can obtain police assistance despite their immigration status.

Education and prevention

The epidemic of VAWG seen in London is not something that we can ‘police our way out of’. The Committee heard repeatedly about the importance of education in preventing and tackling VAWG. This starts in primary school: with high quality education for children about healthy relationships, and continues into secondary school and beyond.

Early education as a key form of VAWG prevention

Early education on healthy relationships, consent and respect for women and girls is vital in addressing misogynistic and harmful attitudes in wider society. The Committee heard about the importance of beginning this education early in a child’s life. Janaya Walker, from EVAW, told us: “We have got to look more upstream, we have got to look at early education, we have got to look at interventions, before we get to a crisis point, or before we get to the point at which harm has already occurred.”⁸²

Many of our guests also told us that preventative education is the most important tool for tackling VAWG, as it challenges the harmful and misogynistic attitudes that sit behind the current epidemic in violence. Kate Lexén from the healthy relationships charity Tender, told us that this sort of education is the best way to tackle VAWG, as when it is delivered “early on from primary school upwards” it equips children and young people “with those skills to be able to prevent abuse.”⁸³

*I have 12-year-old boys talking about what their wife will be allowed to do when they are older.*⁸⁴

Ellie Softley, Everyone’s Invited

This need for early education is accelerated by the digital landscape, with children exposed to harmful content at increasingly younger ages. This can be seen in a 2021 Ofsted report which carried out survey work mainly at a selection of secondary schools.⁸⁵ It found that 88 per cent of girls had experience of being sent sexual pictures or videos they did not want to see, compared to 49 per cent of boys. This online exposure can have real world consequences. The

⁸² London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 1](#), 26 February 2025, p. 9

⁸³ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 2](#), 26 February 2025, p. 1

⁸⁴ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 2](#), 26 February 2025, p. 14

⁸⁵ The majority of schools sampled were secondary schools, but the research also included two primary schools.

same Ofsted report also stated that 64 per cent of girls surveyed believed that unwanted touching occurred “a lot or sometimes” between children of the same age at their school.⁸⁶

Ellie Softley from Everyone’s Invited (EI) told the Committee that as part of EI’s educational work, it presented these statistics to children from year 7 (aged 11–12) upwards. She told us that “ninety-nine per cent of the time, not a single student raises their hand” to indicate that the statistics are a surprise to them.⁸⁷

The Committee was shocked to hear about this lack of surprise from children at these figures. This suggests that by the time a child is in secondary school, they may well already be accustomed to seeing harmful online content. It also suggests that girls in secondary school are already suffering from, or accustomed to witnessing, harmful behaviours such as unwanted touching from peers.

We believe these findings strengthen the need for healthy relationships and gender equality education early in a child’s school life.

The Committee also heard about positive work undertaken by the Mayor in this area, particularly around his partnership with Tender and the launch of the Primary Teacher’s Toolkit to teach pupils about healthy and respectful relationships.⁸⁸ Kate Lexén, Tender, told us that the “toolkit is really important in giving teachers something that they can draw on”.⁸⁹ She also highlighted that it is “accessible for every teacher in London [...] In that toolkit, we have information about the issue and how to have those conversations and we have some example exercises that we have been delivering for years.”⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Ofsted, [Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges](#), 10 June 2021

⁸⁷ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 2](#), 26 February 2025, p. 2

⁸⁸ Tender, [Tender partners with MOPAC to launch a new Teacher Toolkit for primary schools](#), 18 October 2024

⁸⁹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 2](#), 26 February 2025, p. 18

⁹⁰ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 2](#), 26 February 2025, p. 18

The Mayor’s Primary School Toolkit

The Mayor launched the toolkit in 2024. It was funded with £1m of Mayoral funding and developed by the healthy relationships charity Tender. It uses workshops, drama, and interactive sessions in the classroom to engage with young Londoners aged between 9-11. It helps to educate them about healthy and respectful relationships and attitudes. The toolkit is freely available online for all primary schools to use. Tender also run training for teachers alongside the toolkit. The full launch followed a trial in which 230 teachers received toolkit training. According to research from Tender, 89 per cent of teachers who received the training reported increased confidence to support children and young people about healthy relationships.⁹¹

Feedback on the toolkit has been positive. Kate Lexén reported that 89 per cent of teachers, on average, have said that it has “positively impacted their ability or their confidence to have conversations with children and young people about relationships”. However, she added that teachers want even more support to enable them to have the confidence to deliver what they have learned in the classroom.⁹² She said:

“They can have that information at their fingertips, but being able to have that conversation in the room can be really challenging, so they want to see professionals doing it. Our professionals have been doing this for 20 years, like I say, and a lot of our facilitators have been doing this for a very, very long time. They have had every single conversation that could possibly crop up in this area, which means that a teacher observing that gets a bit more confidence in terms of how they can deliver it. We are looking at more direct delivery in the room to model that behaviour but, like I say, it existing as a resource that all teachers can access is a foundational, positive start to what is a complex issue.”⁹³

The Committee welcomes the toolkit approach taken by the Mayor, as well as the focus on prevention and education in his current VAWG strategy, which commits to delivering an inclusive schools’ programme – including teacher training.⁹⁴ We urge the Mayor to continue to prioritise the delivery of the early education and prevention aspects in his refreshed VAWG strategy as well as expansion for guidance on new legislation criminalising VAWG behaviours such as cyber flashing and controlling and coercive behaviour.

⁹¹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 2](#), 26 February 2025, p. 18

⁹² London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 2](#), 26 February 2025, p. 18

⁹³ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 2](#), 26 February 2025, p. 18

⁹⁴ MOPAC, [The Mayor’s VAWG Strategy 2022-25](#)

Parental engagement: Love Island and beyond

The role of parents and guardians, particularly for boys and young men, is critical in addressing harmful attitudes, and challenging the assumptions and values of misogynistic online content. This is particularly important following concerning research undertaken by market research company Savanta showing that one in three young men have a positive view of self-described misogynist online influencer Andrew Tate,⁹⁵ who has a record of using highly misogynistic and harmful language.

During our evidence sessions, the Committee was told about the importance of parents and carers engaging with their child in discussions on what constitutes healthy relationships. To aid parents communication with their children, parents can access online resources, including resources provided by charities such as Parentkind and the NSPCC.⁹⁶ We also heard about sessions that charities and organisations run specifically for parents. Ellie Softley, EI, told the Committee:

“Something that we talk to parents about that has been quite popular, and actually quite successful, is in our parent sharing we essentially give them prompts and television shows or things that they can watch with their kids to aid discussion [...] We encourage parents to lean in and to be inquisitive about what their kids are engaging with online.”⁹⁷

The Committee agrees with the value of a parent or guardian watching a television programme with their child, and using it as a base from which to discuss healthy relationships. For example, the Netflix drama ‘Adolescence’ explores how boys are being influenced online and provides an opportunity for parents to talk to their children about important issues that affect and shape their lives, including masculinity, violence, healthy relationships, consent, bullying, peer pressure and social media. Similarly, Ellie Softley told us:

“One example that I love – and much to the outrage of lots of parents across the UK – is that we tell parents, ‘Sit and watch Love Island with your kids. Sit and watch reality dating shows with them’, because if you think they are not watching it, that is not true because it gets clipped up and put on social media anyway. [...] I think that is such a clever and meaningful way to not tell off your kids or lecture your kids but to try to see where they are at, to meet that, to be able to be critical and use that as a teaching moment.”⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Savanta, [One in three young males have a positive view of Andrew Tate](#), 8 June 2023

⁹⁶ Two examples of these resources are Parentkind’s [‘Communicating about relationships and values with your child’](#) page, and the NSPCC’s [‘Promoting healthy relationships’](#) page (the NSPCC’s resource also contains links to further resources.) The RSHE Service also provides a [resource for parents](#).

⁹⁷ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 2](#), 26 February 2025, p. 4

⁹⁸ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 2](#), 26 February 2025, p. 4-5

I once had a parent come up to me – a father – and he said, “Well, I let my kids watch Love Island, but I watch it with them and then in the car ride to school in the morning we talk about the dynamics of each relationship”.⁹⁹

Ellie Softley, Everyone’s Invited

The Committee also heard about the challenges around parental engagement. While groups such as EI and Tender do run support groups and advice session for parents on how to engage their children on these topics, the Committee heard that it can be a challenge to get parents to attend in the first place. Ellie Softley told us: “One of my biggest points is parental engagement. It is so difficult, parental engagement, we ran a session with a school with 900 students, not a single parent showed up.”¹⁰⁰

Even when parents do attend events on healthy relationship education, we heard that other barriers could prevent constructive engagement. The Committee is particularly concerned about the gulf in digital understanding across generations, and how this impacts discussion. We heard that this digital divide between parents and children has never been bigger than it currently is. Ellie Softley told us that “there is such a disconnect between what parents think are happening in their kids’ lives and the reality of what is happening.”¹⁰¹ She also highlighted that “There has never been a larger generational gap than there is right now. Parents are not digitally literate, but they are not trying to be either.”¹⁰² She added:

“Our most-taken-up session, although we only get one or two parents show up, is our parent sessions where they just want us to sit and tell them what their kids are seeing on their phones. Their faces, when you show them what they might have access to, is like their minds have been completely blown.”¹⁰³

Our guests considered that banning social media apps and digital platforms wasn’t necessarily the best course of action. Professor Jessica Ringrose said:

“Some of these new mobile phone banning policies, I believe, are going to create a bigger chasm between the young people and adults because when there is a banning mentality – or abstinence does not work; we know that with drugs and alcohol – what

⁹⁹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 2](#), 26 February 2025, p. 4

¹⁰⁰ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 2](#), 26 February 2025, p. 2

¹⁰¹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 2](#), 26 February 2025, p. 2

¹⁰² London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 2](#), 26 February 2025, p. 2

¹⁰³ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 2](#), 26 February 2025, p. 3

we need is more digital literacy, not less. My fear is that with this huge trend to smartphone-free childhoods and mobile phone banning, we are just going to have a bigger chasm of lack of understanding between the adults and the young people.”¹⁰⁴

Rather than taking a banning approach, most of our guests said that it was more important for parents to show an interest in what children and young people are seeing online, and talking to them about it.¹⁰⁵

However, there was notable criticism of one app above others: of all the popular social media apps, our guests argued that Snapchat posed the most danger to children. Snapchat is a popular messaging app. Users can take photos, record videos and send messages to an individual or a group. Snapchat’s message function allows images to vanish from the recipient’s phone after a few seconds of viewing them, although it is possible to screenshot these images. The Online Safety Act introduced by the previous government has made great strides in safeguarding millions of children online but social media networks have noted the difficulties in policing such enormous quantities of information and safeguarding all users.

This is not the first time Snapchat has been identified as a particular cause for concern: The safer internet campaign group Internet Matters lists one of the dangers of Snapchat as “disappearing messages, which can make it hard to collect evidence in cases of bullying or similar behaviours.”¹⁰⁶ The NSPCC says that because of the disappearing nature of messages on Snapchat, children could be more at risk of “sharing something that makes them feel uncomfortable or could harm or upset someone else”.¹⁰⁷

Professor Ringrose told us that “if you take a banning approach, it should be platform specific,” and that in the case of Snapchat, “the risks outweigh the benefits.”¹⁰⁸

I am sure the Mayor could promote some kinds of engagements with parents, even leaflets like, ‘Here is how Snapchat works’, so that parents are not so afraid because Snapchat is a terrible offender.”¹⁰⁹

Professor Jessica Ringrose, University College London

¹⁰⁴ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 2](#), 26 February 2025, p. 3

¹⁰⁵ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 2](#), 26 February 2025, p. 4

¹⁰⁶ Internet Matters, [What is Snapchat? What parents need to know](#)

¹⁰⁷ NSPCC, [Is Snapchat safe for my child?](#)

¹⁰⁸ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 2](#), 26 February 2025, p. 13

¹⁰⁹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 2](#), 26 February 2025, p. 13

The Committee was alarmed to hear that victims of intimate image abuse can be deterred from reporting due to fear that they will face legal repercussions for sharing their intimate images of themselves. Ellie Softley told us of a 14 year old who did not seek support for their intimate image abuse because they were afraid of going to prison.

The Committee also heard that the tendency to reduce online misogyny to a single influencer, Andrew Tate, can undermine its complexity and prevalence. The wider picture, colloquially referred to as the ‘Manosphere’, is defined as “loose confederacy of interest groups that includes four main categories, amongst others:

- Pick Up Artists
- Involuntary Celibates (Incels)
- Men’s Rights Activists
- Men Going Their Own Way.”¹¹⁰

While the manosphere is not ideologically uniform and contains varying perspectives on masculinity and feminism, its communities are united by a shared misogynistic and male supremacist worldview.

The Committee believes there is a need for centralised trustworthy support and guidance for all parents and carers on how to keep children safe online, and that the Mayor could be doing more to help address this gap. The previous government introducing the Online Safety Act which is pivotal in combatting misogynist behaviour and VAWG specific offences such as cyber flashing. A central resource for parents, based on the Mayor’s school’s toolkit model, would provide a valuable resource for parents in several ways:

- It could be used as a resource to assist parents with often difficult conversations with their children, particularly young boys, about healthy relationships, respect, and consent.
- It would provide an up-to-date resource for parents to understand current social media trends and risks around harmful and misogynistic online content.
- It could provide advice and guidance on how to check-in with children about experiences at school and provide signposting to further support if needed.
- It could be used as a further resource to assist parents and those in a safeguarding role to recognise when offences have occurred and assist in mitigating the under reporting of VAWG offences.
- It could provide guidance reflecting changes in law, including new offences, for instances in relation to the Online Safety Act, with the aim of increasing awareness, informing victims of intimate image abuse that they are not criminally liable, and ultimately increasing VAWG reporting.

¹¹⁰ Center for Countering Digital Hate, [Inside the manosphere: understanding extreme misogyny online](#), 12 April 2024

The Committee suggests that a parent’s toolkit should be based on a partnership approach in the same way the Mayor commissioned Tender to build the existing schools toolkit for teachers.¹¹¹

We believe a parent’s toolkit should be hosted online, and promoted via the Mayor’s communication channels. It should contain information about the risks of different social media apps, collated information about ways in which parents can increase safety online, and details on how to limit access to certain online content. It should also contain guidance, conversation starting ideas, and ideas for fun and engaging ways for parents to engage their children in conversations about equal, healthy, and respectful relationships.

Recommendation 5

The Mayor should commission a Parent’s Toolkit to support them in teaching their children about healthy physical and online relationships from a young age, based on the model for the existing School’s Toolkit. This programme must include a consultation process with stakeholders, including young people, teachers, parents and VAWG sector organisations. The Mayor should commission this by 31 December 2025.

The programme should also establish specific mechanisms for ensuring the toolkit is updated at least every six months, to reflect the fast-changing nature of the harmful online environments that promote misogynistic attitudes and ideas.

The importance of role models for boys and young men

Responsibility for a preventative approach to tackling VAWG does not just fall to one element of society. If a preventative approach is to be effective, it has to involve engagement from the whole community. Kate Lexén from Tender told us:

“It has to be a whole-community approach. We cannot just rely on parents to be tackling this issue. I am speaking as a parent who is relatively well informed, I work in this space, but I still feel very fearful about my children growing up in this online hybrid world. Therefore, it has to be around everyone that comes into contact with that child and young person, which fundamentally is schools as well. I think it is a joint approach, it has to be about the whole community.”¹¹²

We also heard about the importance of male role models for boys and young men, and the fact that sometimes a strong counter narrative to online misogyny was missing. The Committee

¹¹¹ Tender, [Tender partners with MOPAC to launch a new Teacher Toolkit for primary schools](#), 18 October 2024

¹¹² London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 2](#), 26 February 2025, p. 3

further recognises the impact of other such initiatives using positive role models such as Idris Elba’s efforts to mitigate knife crime.¹¹³ DAC Alexis Boon, the Met, used the comparator of other forms of online extremism, where a counter narrative comes out to challenge, provide an alternative point of view and “put the facts out there”. He told us:

“That is possibly what is missing in the VAWG space, those strong role models and people who can come out and challenge [Andrew] Tate on his own turf. We are very worried, to put it bluntly, about those influencers and those individuals and the influence they have and there needs to be some kind of counter to this. Is it effective? Is it strong? No, it is not at the moment. I cannot see it in the way that it should be. You can equate it to terrorism in some ways, it is extremism and we should counter it in a similar vein.”¹¹⁴

The Mayor has done some positive work around mentoring and male role models. The VRU has commissioned mentoring programmes which have reached thousands of young people. This includes a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) support programme, which involves one-to-one support for young people aged 11–18 years-old who have been excluded from secondary school or are at risk of exclusion.¹¹⁵ Evaluations of these programmes have been largely positive.¹¹⁶

Lib Peck, Director of the VRU, told us:

“What we recognised is there is the power of that trusted individual and the importance of that male role model to change perceptions [...] into something that makes a young boy maybe feel alienated and not sure where they fit and who they are meant to be following. By having that relationship, having that emphasis on mentoring, that really helps.”¹¹⁷

However, not every boy and young man in London can be reached by a mentoring project. To counter harmful online content, we believe positive male role models, that are relatable and understandable, need to be platformed and championed across the city. This may include more traditional notions of Mayoral partnerships with famous footballers or musicians. We note in this context that the former England football manager Sir Gareth Southgate recently addressed the importance of role models for boys and young men in 2025’s annual Richard Dimbleby Lecture. He said: “Many don’t have mentors – teachers, coaches, bosses – who understand how best to push them to grow.” As a result, “young men end up withdrawing, reluctant to talk or

¹¹³ [BBC One - Idris Elba: Our Knife Crime Crisis](#)

¹¹⁴ London Assembly, Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London, 12 March 2025, p. 37

¹¹⁵ VRU, [Mentoring in Pupil Referral Units](#)

¹¹⁶ Between September 2022 and July 2024, more than 1,500 young people across 22 boroughs were supported by mentors funded by the VRU. Over these two academic years, 82% of pupil referral units and alternative provision settings reported improved attendance in young people mentored as well as improved relationships with peers and teaching staff. (Source: BBC News, [‘I’m passionate about mentoring excluded pupils’](#), 15 November 2024)

¹¹⁷ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London](#), 12 March 2025, p. 15

express their emotions. They spend more time online searching for direction and are falling into unhealthy alternatives.”¹¹⁸

The Committee heard there is also space for ‘normal’ male models and positive examples of masculinity to be used alongside celebrity campaigns. Ellie Softley, EI, told us that she would like to see:

“More of a move to people that [boys and young men] see every day in their community and uplifting people that they see every day in their community that are ‘normal people’, [...] It is having those role models, empowering men as well and saying to the male teachers in schools, ‘In this conversation, we not only want you, but we need you and we need you to be here more’.”¹¹⁹

The VRU told us about programmes it is running for fathers, particularly for those who have experience of trauma or domestic abuse in their own upbringing. This includes the Strengthening Fathers Programme, currently in a pilot phase, which offers a combination of bespoke workshops and support groups for caregivers and young fathers with complex needs.¹²⁰ Lib Peck told us:

“It is breaking that intergenerational pattern and making sure there is positive role models. The two programmes that we are investing in, both in the north and south of London, which are a consortia of organisations, are really providing that safe space for fathers to be able to explore their feelings, giving them therapeutic support and also giving them access to the services that again they often feel inhibited from going to because they do not feel maybe that is what they should be doing as a man.”¹²¹

More visibility for this work on positive fatherhood and masculinity would be welcome in London, particularly in terms of countering negative and misogynistic online content.

Uplifting people that they see every day in their community that are ‘normal people’, that have jobs that they might want to go into one day, that is not being a tennis superstar.”¹²²

Ellie Softley, Everyone’s Invited

¹¹⁸ BBC News, [Sir Gareth Southgate: Boys need role models not gaming and porn](#), 19 March 2025

¹¹⁹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 2](#), 26 February 2025, p. 17

¹²⁰ VRU, [Strengthening Fathers: Evaluation](#)

¹²¹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London](#), 12 March 2025, p. 15-16

¹²² London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 2](#), 26 February 2025, p. 17

The Committee would like to see the Mayor commission and champion work around using some of these positive examples of fatherhood in work around male role models, incorporating lessons from real world experience and local communities.

Recommendation 6

Within the next year, the Mayor should undertake an information campaign uplifting and championing relatable and 'everyday' positive male role models, as a counter narrative to the harmful misogynistic content offered by some online influencers.

This programme should link with the VRU's work around positive fatherhood and male identity.

Support for young victims and survivors of VAWG

Once a young woman or girl feels able to report and seek help when facing violence or abuse, a vital next step is ensuring there is support in place for them. Both MOPAC and the VRU commission essential support services for victims and survivors of VAWG, including young people. However, these services are under severe strain and our investigation indicates there is a need for more services that cater for young people’s needs. For example, Jain Lemom, MOPAC, painted a bleak picture around youth specific VAWG services:

“The dearth of services for young people when they do experience forms of VAWG and there are not enough services across VAWG full stop, but then there are particular groups, young people being one of those groups, that do not have the level of service provision that they should have.”¹²³

The Committee welcomes the commitment in the Mayor’s current VAWG Strategy to “expand the highest quality of specialised tailored support for all victims and survivors in London”.¹²⁴ We believe that provision of high quality services for young people, to plug the gap and ensure they have the level of services they need, should be a priority area in the Mayor’s new VAWG strategy. Further to this, an understanding of all specialised and tailored support networks which are available to victims is necessary and a review encompassing their capabilities, regions in which they operate and their capacity will be essential to best target additional funding.

Snapshot of MOPAC and VRU support services for young people

- **Advance: Maia:** Programmes that support young women and girls aged 13 - 25, through one-to-one support, mentoring or group work. It is particularly focused on young women and girls who are at risk of domestic abuse and have one or more other risk factors such as deprivation or risk of being exploited.^{125 126}
- **Bambu Project, delivered by Rise Mutual and the Richmond Fellowship:** Programme that delivers therapeutic interventions to young people that have been impacted by domestic abuse aged 15–24.^{127 128}

¹²³ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London](#), 12 March 2025, p. 2

¹²⁴ MOPAC, [The Mayor’s VAWG Strategy for London 2022–25](#)

¹²⁵ VRU, [Advance – Maia and Lift service](#)

¹²⁶ Advance, [Maia and Lift](#)

¹²⁷ VRU, [Bambu Project](#)

¹²⁸ Rise, [The Bambu Project](#)

- **London Holistic Wrap Around & Advocacy Service:** Focuses on accommodation and support for women with No Recourse to Public Funds.¹²⁹
- **The Lighthouse:** Service for children and young people who have experienced any form of sexual abuse, including exploitation.¹³⁰
- **The Havens:** Support service for those who have been raped or sexually assaulted in the past 12 months. Havens is the sexual assault referral service for London, run by King’s College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust and jointly funded by NHS England and MOPAC.¹³¹

By-and-for services

Services that are led by-and-for women, as well as those that are led-by-and-for marginalised women, including Black and migrant women, are essential in providing support to victims and survivors of VAWG in London. The Committee heard that “these services are absolutely essential in the effective provision of support to girls and young women”.¹³²

In written evidence provided to the Committee, the VAWG charity Advance highlighted the need for specialist services ‘by-and-for’ women, as well as the unique needs of women under the age of 25:

“Girls and young women under the age of 25 have specific and intersecting needs shaped by their gender and age. These needs can include mental health issues and low self-esteem, limited access to reliable information and a lack of trusted mentors. Some grapple with complex needs arising from recent experiences of abuse or trauma, while adverse childhood experiences can also have a substantial impact on a person’s health throughout their life [...]

With nowhere to turn for support, girls and young women can be left traumatised by their experiences and can go on to experience further harm, including being excluded from school or getting caught up in the criminal justice system.”¹³³

By-and-for services are vital in providing an appropriate response for young girls and women seeking help. Janaya Walker from EVAW told the Committee that, police intervention is not always the best response. She said:

¹²⁹ [London Holistic Wrap Around Advocacy Service](#)

¹³⁰ University College London Hospitals, [The Lighthouse](#)

¹³¹ The Havens, [About Us](#)

¹³² Written evidence received from Advance

¹³³ Written evidence received from Advance.

“In many cases, police intervention, particularly when we are talking about schools, it is not the appropriate route. What we would want is referral to specialist services. We are talking about mental health services, we are talking about frontline VAWG services, who can give that tailored support, who can look at the issue as one of welfare and safeguarding rather than only as a policing response – which sometimes can escalate things and can take things out of the hands of the victim.”¹³⁴

We also heard about the pressures these ‘by-and-for’ support services are under. Jain Lemom from MOPAC told us:

“Those services are overwhelmed. It seems that it is almost like you lift a rock up and then loads of stuff comes out. That is unfortunately where we are with VAWG. You set something up and then that quickly gets overwhelmed.”¹³⁵

We [MOPAC] do not advertise our services because if we did, everybody would fall over. [...] I do want to manage expectation and to say, again, it will never, ever be able to help everyone.”¹³⁶

Jain Lemom, Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime

Janaya Walker from EVAW echoed these statements:

“It feels as though lots of services really are struggling and young women and girls are really struggling in terms of getting access to support and then finding out what routes to justice or routes to get mental health support are available, but it is clearly bleak in many ways.”¹³⁷

The Committee was alarmed to hear about the specific example of the Survivor’s Gateway, the hub for sexual violence support services in London. Developed by the four London Rape Crisis Centres, Survivors UK, LGBT+ anti-abuse charity Galop and the Havens, the Gateway aims to simplify access routes into support services for victims of sexual violence and rape. Janaya Walker, EVAW, told us about how demand on the Gateway was so high it had been forced to pause referrals:

¹³⁴ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 1](#), 26 February 2025, p. 6

¹³⁵ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London](#), 12 March 2025, p. 19

¹³⁶ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London](#), 12 March 2025, p. 21

¹³⁷ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 1](#), 26 February 2025, p. 1-2

“There are routes to support through the London Survivors Gateway, but as I understand, it is operating at peak demand, I just checked its website yesterday and all online referrals have been stopped because of the extent to which that service is under demand.”¹³⁸

At the time of writing (24 April 2025), the Gateway’s website states that “Due to high demand, our service is now paused to online referrals until Tuesday 6 May at 9am.”¹³⁹ MOPAC does not expect the Gateway to meet demand any time soon, stating: “We are never, ever in the near future going to meet demand because people just keep coming.”¹⁴⁰

MOPAC has taken action to address this. Jain Lemom, MOPAC, highlighted that MOPAC is currently in the process of commissioning a brand-new pan-London sexual violence support service. She explained that the design of the new service includes being “much more efficient about monitoring demand and capacity and being able to predict surge a bit more and being able to move staff around.”¹⁴¹ She added:

“To deal with sexual violence on a daily basis is quite draining for the staff in the service. We had to be quite careful about thinking about new roles or how to break the patterns in roles so that they do not have that heaviness on them. The demand and capacity model that we have built is actually quite a new thing. We are really trying to think more about the technological side of things and the technological help. [...] For those who come and cannot get access immediately to an Independent Domestic Abuse Adviser (IDVA) or to any therapeutic care or holistic care, we have made sure that part of this new service that is coming online will have a lot more around self-help or other forms of technologies and group work as well. It is a beefed-up service, but I do want to manage expectation and to say, again, it will never, ever be able to help everyone. It will just do its absolute best to do what it can in the funding envelope.”¹⁴²

The Committee was also concerned to hear about ‘cliff-edges’ of funding that damage service delivery. Sanskriti Sanghi from Southall Black Sisters told us:

“On the London Holistic [Advocacy] Wrap Around [Service] (LHAWAS) project [...] there is a cliff edge of funding between October 2025 and April 2026, and that six-month intervening period before the bid goes live in April [2026] again, there is an intervening

¹³⁸ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 1](#), 26 February 2025, p. 19

¹³⁹ [London Survivor’s Gateway](#), accessed 27 March 2025. The site also states “If you are a survivor who has questions about support options or how our service works, please call us on 0808 801 0860,” as well as providing [links to crisis numbers](#).

¹⁴⁰ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London](#), 12 March 2025, p. 21

¹⁴¹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London](#), 12 March 2025, p. 21

¹⁴² London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London](#), 12 March 2025, p. 21

period where Black, minoritised and migrant women will not have a service like LHAWAS to receive a holistic wraparound service.”¹⁴³

This example illustrates the importance of, and need for, sustainable funding that can be factored into planning for VAWG services without gaps. We believe that it is vital that the Mayor prioritises additional sustainable funding for support services in his renewed VAWG strategy.

The Mayor’s VAWG Grassroots fund

The Mayor’s VAWG Grassroots Fund 2023-25 was seen by our guests as a vital source of funding for VAWG sector organisations.

The original grassroots fund covered 2021-23 and was worth £3 million. In September 2024, the Mayor announced that the fund would be renewed at the same level for the 2023-25 fund.¹⁴⁴

The fund is managed on behalf of MOPAC by the London Community Foundation (LCF). The LCF states that the first fund “supported 41 specialist organisations who focus on ending violence against women and girls by providing two-year grants of up to £100,000.”¹⁴⁵ The majority of organisations funded were ‘by-and-for’ organisations, focused on services for marginalised women.¹⁴⁶

The Committee heard positive reflections on the fund. Jain Lemom, MOPAC, said:

“My reflections on the Grassroots Fund are that it was – and it continues to be – a piece of innovation and it really, really has changed the provision across London and who gets access to services. The most unique thing about the Grassroots Fund for me is that we tied to it a capacity building element, which is very unusual. Through that fund, we are able to ensure that smaller organisations that sometimes do not have the reach and access into funds that the bigger organisations do were able to get funding for them to support sometimes very, very vulnerable members of our London community.”¹⁴⁷

The future of the fund has not yet been announced. Jain Lemom, MOPAC, highlighted that MOPAC is in the process of developing a new VAWG Strategy and would be making decisions

¹⁴³ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London – Panel 1](#), 26 February 2025, p. 7

¹⁴⁴ Mayor of London, [Mayor announces new £3million investment to support grassroots community groups tackling violence against women and girls](#), 19 September 2024

¹⁴⁵ MOPAC and the London Community Foundation, [MOPAC VAWG Grassroots Fund 2023-25](#), July 2023

¹⁴⁶ London Community Foundation, [£3m awarded to organisations tackling VAWG](#), 5 May 2021

¹⁴⁷ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London](#), 12 March 2025, p. 19

as to where it will be targeting its money based on this.¹⁴⁸ When questioned on a potential gap in funding in the renewal of the fund, Jain Lemom told us that the fund was not meant to provide a continuous source of funding. She explained:

“It is there to kickstart and stabilise organisations and a gap, unusually, is quite helpful in this regard, because what we do not want to do is to create a dependency on this particular fund. This fund is there to help over a period of time to capacity-build, to get organisations strong enough to reach out and leverage in other funding.”¹⁴⁹

The Committee accepts that the Grassroots Fund is not designed to be a sustainable funding stream. However, given the pressure VAWG sector organisations are under, the Committee urges the Mayor to set out a detailed plan for sustainable VAWG funding, for at least the next three years, as part of his upcoming refreshed VAWG strategy.

Recommendation 7

As part of the renewal of the Grassroots Fund, the Mayor should publish a plan and guidance for how organisations who have benefited from the fund can access more sustainable funding sources. Guidance should also include the responsibilities of these organisations to share information with relevant authorities, such as police services, to better encourage reporting of VAWG.

Recommendation 8

As part of his renewed VAWG strategy, the Mayor should publish a fully costed and multi-year financial plan for how he will support VAWG sector organisations and review their capacity and capability to deliver services over the next three years. This should be published by 31 December 2025.

¹⁴⁸ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London](#), 12 March 2025, p. 19

¹⁴⁹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Violence Against Women and Girls: The Impact on Young People in London](#), 12 March 2025, p. 20

Committee Activity

The Committee held its first meeting on the impact of VAWG on young people in London on 26 February 2025 at City Hall. The following guests attended this session:

- **Janaya Walker**, Head of Public Affairs, End Violence Against Women coalition
- **Sanskriti Sanghi**, Policy, Campaigns and Communications Officer, Southall Black Sisters
- **Kate Lexén**, Director of Services, Tender
- **Ellie Softley**, Head of Education and Facilitation, Everyone's Invited
- **Professor Jessica Ringrose**, Co-Director, Centre for Sociology of Education and Equity, University College London

The Committee held its second meeting on 12 March 2025 at City Hall. The following guests attended this session:

- **Jain Lemom**, Head of Tackling VAWG, MOPAC
- **Will Balakrishnan**, Director of Commissioning and Partnerships, MOPAC
- **Lib Peck**, Director, London's Violence Reduction Unit
- **DAC Alexis Boon**, Metropolitan Police
- **DCS Angela Craggs**, Metropolitan Police

The Committee also received written evidence from the following organisations:

- **London Youth Assembly**
- **Advance**
- **Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse**

Other formats and languages

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Nếu ông (bà) muốn nội dung văn bản này được dịch sang tiếng Việt, xin vui lòng liên hệ với chúng tôi bằng điện thoại, thư hoặc thư điện tử theo địa chỉ ở trên.

Greek

Εάν επιθυμείτε περίληψη αυτού του κειμένου στην γλώσσα σας, παρακαλώ καλέστε τον αριθμό ή επικοινωνήστε μαζί μας στην ανωτέρω ταχυδρομική ή την ηλεκτρονική διεύθυνση.

Turkish

Bu belgenin kendi dilinize çevrilmiş bir özetini okumak isterseniz, lütfen yukarıdaki telefon numarasını arayın, veya posta ya da e-posta adresi aracılığıyla bizimle temasa geçin.

Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਸ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਦਾ ਸੰਖੇਪ ਆਪਣੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਲੈਣਾ ਚਾਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਇਸ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਫ਼ੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜਾਂ ਉਪਰ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਡਾਕ ਜਾਂ ਈਮੇਲ ਪਤੇ 'ਤੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

Hindi

यदि आपको इस दस्तावेज़ का सारांश अपनी भाषा में चाहिए तो उपर दिये हुए नंबर पर फोन करें या उपर दिये गये डाक पते या ई मेल पते पर हम से संपर्क करें।

Bengali

আপনি যদি এই দলিলের একটা সারাংশ নিজের ভাষায় পেতে চান, তাহলে দয়া করে ফো করবেন অথবা উল্লেখিত ডাক ঠিকানায় বা ই-মেইল ঠিকানায় আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করবেন।

Urdu

اگر آپ کو اس دستاویز کا خلاصہ اپنی زبان میں درکار ہو تو، براہ کرم نمبر پر فون کریں یا مذکورہ بالا ڈاک کے پتے یا ای میل پتے پر ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔

Arabic

الحصول على ملخص لهذا المستند بلغة،
فارجاء الاتصال برقم الهاتف أو الاتصال على
العنوان البريدي العادي أو عنوان البريدي
الالكتروني أعلاه.

Gujarati

જો તમારે આ દસ્તાવેજનો સાર તમારી ભાષામાં જોઈતો હોય તો ઉપર આપેલ નંબર પર ફોન કરો અથવા ઉપર આપેલ ટપાલ અથવા ઈ-મેઇલ સરનામા પર અમારો સંપર્ક કરો.

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