

Police and Crime Commissioners

21 August 2018

MOPAC13062018-D1951

Dear Police Commissioner

I am writing to bring your attention to a cross-party London Assembly campaign backed by the Mayor of London and myself as Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime for the introduction of a Domestic Abusers Register. I am keen to gauge your interest in this issue as a Police and Crime Commissioner and ask you to support this campaign.

In the Mayor's Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, the Mayor of London has set out his vision to make the capital a safer city for women and girls.¹ One of the measures in this strategy calls on the Government to create a register for perpetrators of domestic abuse and violence which would assist police forces across England and Wales to manage the risk of domestic abuse at a time of reduced resources.

In the year ending December 2017, there was a 21% increase in the number of domestic abuse-related offences recorded by the police (568,910 from 469,624).² We believe that this is in part due to an increased number of victims having the confidence to come forward and report crime, which reflects the progress made by police forces across England and Wales to improve their ability to identify domestic abuse and offer support to victims. However, it is equally clear that the number of reported offences represent a small fraction of the true number of crimes that are being committed. The Crime Survey for England and Wales estimates that 26% of women and 15% of men aged 16 to 59 had experienced some form of domestic abuse since the age of 16, equivalent to 4.3 million women and 2.4 million men.³ In the last year alone, 7.5% of women and 4.3% of men across England and Wales experienced domestic abuse and domestic abuse now accounts for 1 in 10 of all offences in England and Wales.⁴ Behind each statistic there is a story to be told about a life lost, destroyed, or damaged at the hands of a domestic abuser. It is essential that we take tougher action to protect survivors and their children from these vile acts.

¹ https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/vawg_strategy_2018-21.pdf

² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingdecember2017>

³ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabusefindingfromthecrimesurveyforenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2017>

⁴ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabusefindingfromthecrimesurveyforenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2017> and

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/dec/08/one-in-10-crimes-recorded-by-police-are-domestic-abuse-cases-ons>

Our proposal encourages proactive risk management by placing the onus on domestic abuse offenders to register details such as changes to their address to the police so that their offending history is known by local officers. In this way the Register would operate in a similar way to the Sex Offenders Register which is currently used to manage perpetrators of sexual offences.

London Assembly Members have unanimously chosen to take this forward as a cross-party campaign and are seeking legislative change to allow for the establishment of a register of domestic abuse offenders. The campaign is further backed by a number of London MPs and leading members of the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) sector, including from the Chair of the Mayor of London's VAWG Board, Respect and the Her Centre. The Mayor of Manchester, Andy Burnham, has also backed the proposal in principle, subject to detail on technical issues. As political leaders for policing and safety, we have an opportunity to push for change which will improve the safety of those at risk of domestic abuse.

The government has sought to do more to protect against domestic abuse – using Domestic Violence Protection Orders, Criminal Behaviour Orders, and the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme – however the tools which we give to the police could be improved. With the announcement of the Government's Draft Domestic Abuse Bill, we have an opportunity to make a lasting change which will help to prevent further victims of domestic abuse and protect survivors and their families from further harm.

Nationally, 4 in ten victims of domestic abuse are repeat victims. Furthermore, given that the nature of domestic abuse means that the offender and perpetrator are known to each other, it is clear that a high volume of this crime is carried out by repeat perpetrators attacking the same victim again and again. This makes the management of risk particularly effective through a register which lists the address of offenders and the risk of harm.

It is also clear that the cost to the public purse is high as domestic abuse offences may require alternative accommodation, emotional support, police involvement and the involvement of the wider criminal justice system. Indeed, a 2009 report by the then Association of Chief Police Officers Commissioners (now NPCC) found that if 357 cases of domestic violence were prevented then the costs of the system would in effect lead to it breaking even over a 3-year period. Therefore, as well as the overwhelming moral argument for the prevention of domestic abuse, there is a financial benefit which can be made by introducing a register.

There is also a social stigma involved in going on 'a list' which would further prevent perpetrators from committing domestic abuse. This has been demonstrated with the Sex Offenders Register, which is useful both as a tool for the police to manage offenders but also deters potential offenders as they are concerned of the way they would be judged by the community if it was known that they were on a list. As with the Sex Offenders Register, it is not the case that the names and details of those on the list need to be, or should, be open to the public for this purpose; the mere presence of a list which is accessible to the authorities is a deterrent in of itself.

Whilst I look for your support in relation to this outline framework, it is clear that some of the important details, such as thresholds for inclusion of names on the register, should initially be developed through technical discussions between our partners in the police, the criminal justice system, VAWG organisations, survivors and other interested groups.

In developing the thresholds for the register, we will need to consider technical questions such as which offences committed within an interpersonal relationship would place a person onto the register (given that there are no offences that are specifically 'domestic' unlike offences that automatically warrant inclusion in the Sex Offenders Register).

We also need to ensure that the establishment of a register does not act as a barrier which prevents victims from coming forward to report crimes for fear that the perpetrator may end up on a list. Furthermore, officers must not be given the incentive to ignore unreported domestic abuse offences because they are not on an easily accessible list. Nonetheless, these challenges can be overcome by setting the right thresholds for the register through consultation with VAWG leaders. This is why we need the government to start looking at these issues and begin these discussions at the national level.

A Domestic Abusers Register would place the onus firmly at the feet of the offender. A register would support police forces to manage risk in a cost-effective way which prevents victimisation and therefore reduces demand for the police which is especially important given that resources for the police are unlikely to change. It would also trigger a vital step change in the way we protect victims and their families, particularly children, by giving police officers immediate access to the information they need to more acutely manage risk.

I hope this is a campaign which you will support and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sophie Linden', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sophie Linden
Deputy Mayor for Policing And Crime