

# The Way Forward: Taking action to end violence against women and girls

## VAWG Panel Meeting

**Wednesday 11 September, 14.00-16.00, Committee Room 2, City Hall**

### Attendees:

**Stephen Greenhalgh (DMPC) and Joan Smith (Co-Chair of London VAWG Panel)**

Sima Maqbool, London Councils  
Marai Larasi, Imkaan  
Sarah Green, EAW  
Keith Niven, MPS  
Jenny Hopkins CPS  
Sam Falkner, Met  
Ruth Breslin, Eaves  
Jain Lemom, MOPAC  
Yeliz Osman, MOPAC  
Gemma Woznicki, MOPAC

### Apologies:

Karen-Ingala Smith, Nia  
Denise Marshall, Eaves (someone from Eaves attending on her behalf)  
Mark Jackson, MPS  
Colin Fitzgerald, Respect  
Susan Bewley, NHS  
Carlene Firemen, Msunderstood

### 1. Introductions & minutes / actions from previous meeting

Joan Smith opened the meeting and welcomed attendees. Actions from the previous meeting were discussed as follows:

Action	Owner	Progress
MPS to explore issue of unregulated circumcision centres further and if necessary take this to the Harmful Practices Taskforce to look at any	MOPAC/Met	KN: The Met has reviewed several cases and feel the the issue lies with premissis performing unregulated, non medicalised. There is still a persistent issue with

required lobbying around legal loophole.		relying on testimony from children against parents in order to secure prosecution. Will be moving towards proactive policing as a solution. Will monitor and report back at next meeting.
MPS to report back to the panel on VAWG training for frontline officers on a borough basis and on impact of training.	Met	There are 16 boroughs left to receive training on victim pathways and survivor treatment, so far 2719 officers have been trained. Will monitor the impact of this in due course and provide full update during today's meeting.
MOPAC to meet with Carlene to discuss avoiding duplication of work between Misunderstood and the VAWG Strategy.	MOPAC/CF	Complete
MOPAC to circulate final version of consultation document	MOPAC	Complete
MOPAC to gather more information from schools that are already delivering a whole school approach to VAWG and to develop a checklist for schools to help them implement this.	MOPAC	Underway as part of strategy development process
MOPAC to consider potential benefits from pilots regarding section 28 and cross examination. This would allow for recorded pre-trial cross-examination of vulnerable and intimidated witnesses in cases where it was felt appropriate.	MOPAC	Underway as part of strategy development process

## 1. VAWG consultation and strategy – Yeliz Osman

Yeliz Osman provided an update on the VAWG consultation and next steps with the VAWG strategy. The consultation has now closed and analysis of results has begun, the main emerging themes were:

### Leadership

- Despite localism context MOPAC needs to facilitate more scrutiny of what is going on locally to encourage improvement, share learning and promote good practice and hold to account those that are not under-performing or not moving in the right direction.

#### **Prevention**

- Many agencies have called for prevention work to cover all forms of VAWG so for instance need to learn from the models of prevention work developed by the specialist BAME women's sector in preventing forced marriage, FGM etc and to address the root causes of prostitution through tackling the demand for prostitution and challenging the acceptability of paying for sexual services.

#### **Pan-London DV service**

- Most respondents found it difficult to select one of the options put forward for the development of a pan-London DV service because there is a need for all of these services as some boroughs have patchy provision across all intervention points. People called for a thorough mapping exercise to identify gaps to help inform the development of this service.

#### **Awareness-raising**

- There seems to be a lot of support for raising awareness about VAWG and how to provide appropriate responses amongst friends and family members so that the signs of abuse can be identified early on and they can provide a supportive and helpful response. Many people also called for better coordination and promotion of information on VAWG services in London and for MOPAC to develop a centralised system that maintains up-to-date information.

#### **Prostitution**

- Most respondents welcome the commitment to develop pan-London exit provision for women wishing to exit prostitution and lots of suggestions as to what such a service should include such as drug and alcohol support, one-to-one emotional support/counselling, sexual health support, group support, access to employment and training. Exit strategies need to ensure that women are not criminalised and have access to appropriate housing. Support needs to be long-term as exit is not an event that occurs overnight. It was also suggested that MOPAC should work with women who have already exited to ensure that their voices and experiences inform the development of services.

#### **Health**

- MOPAC needs to demonstrate a lead in relation to health and VAWG. Many have suggested re-establishing a health and VAWG subgroup to ensure that clinical commissioning groups and Health and Wellbeing Boards are engaging with the VAWG sector and integrating VAWG into their joint strategic needs assessments and health and wellbeing strategies.

#### **Police and CJS response**

- There were concerns raised about ongoing negative attitudes from police towards women who are victims of VAWG, in particular domestic violence victims and the need for more training on VAWG for police and other CJS partners including judges, magistrates, CPS, court staff. N.B. This was highlighted by the CEDAW committee too.

#### **Young women and girls**

- Respondents are pleased to see the focus on young women and girls but want to ensure that this is followed through with dedicated interventions and services that are shaped around the needs of young women and girls.

#### **Girls & Gangs**

- MOPAC needs to work with partners to encourage better identification and assessment of needs of young women and girls that are gang-associated and to assess current policy and practice in this area.

#### **Harmful Practices**

- Respondents seem mostly in favour of a pilot initiative focused on harmful practices and have asked that this includes accredited training targeted at different roles/sectors to improve identification, practice and referrals.

#### **Migrant and asylum seeking women**

- Concerns have been raised by many respondents about women with immigration/asylum issues who do not have the same level of protection as UK born victims of violence so there is a potential breach of human rights obligations. For instance Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences often automatically refer women with an uncertain immigration status to UKBA which often results in women being treated as immigration offenders rather than genuine victims of violence.

#### **Perpetrator work**

- People have called for MOPAC to play a role in disseminating key research findings of what works with perpetrators of VAWG through seminars

DPP and ACPO have looked at how to improve the court service as a result of the recent DPP Report looking at how victims are dealt with through the in courts. We need to get this right as failings at that juncture of a case can undo much good work. The police are recommending wider use of Section 28 (cases which allow survivors to be cross examined remotely) allowing survivors to give evidence via video link. They are also looking into cross examination of multiple perpetrator victims as it is widely recognised that cross examination by several defence barriers is an incredibly difficult process.

## **2. Survivor consultation – Marai Larasi, Imkaan**

As part of the strategy refresh process MOPAC commissioned Imkaan to undertake a consultation with survivors which included focus groups, one-to-one interviews and a survey. Marai Larasi provided an overview of the key findings and recommendations of the survivor consultation.

Key findings included the importance of giving women a voice and the opportunity to have their views considered. There were many barriers to accessing support that were identified including isolation, children, feeling trapped, insecure immigration status. A recurrent theme was the feeling of guilt many victims carry with them after they have experienced VAWG and as such the importance of female led services. There was an evident need for services that offered multiple expertise and for those that are able to cater for complex vulnerabilities (drugs, mental health etc). Other issues included:

- Needing access to key support during crisis
- IDVA support is time limited and long term support was lacking
- A need to improve access to young women's services
- GP's responses were inconsistent as were responses from the police, it was felt more training was needed for officers.

Recommendations:

- There needs to be a 'snap shot' of services in order to accurately identify available provision
- Ensure an integrated VAWG approach at local level through also delivery and also commissioning
- Commission the right types of services that are sustainable
- Develop a self-assessment tool
- MOPAC to provide leadership
- Better quality information as to how systems work

### **3. Review recommendations of the Prostitution study – Ruth Breslin**

Ruth presented on the findings of the study undertaken by Eaves on behalf of MOPAC into trafficking and prostitution in London (Capital Exploits). Ruth Breslin was the Manager of the Research and Development team that oversaw the work programme.

The project was funded by MOPAC to assess prostitution, and the extent of trafficking into prostitution, within London by borough identifying hotspots and also mapping emerging trends and patterns in relation to on and off street prostitution. The focus of the document was to detail the experiences and needs of women (over 18) with a view to realise emerging good practice and produce a set of recommendations intended for policy and practice development.

The desk-based research that fed into this work took the form of a short literature review and contact with Local Authorities, police, health, specialist support services etc. Eaves undertook a content analysis of all relevant council policies and strategies and also reviewed relevant local media reporting, held focus groups with voluntary and statutory sector representatives and hosted an online survey for eleven boroughs in total.

The study gathered both qualitative and quantitative data from a variety of sources including a snap shot of borough activity conducted by males volunteers.

#### **Findings**

London has a 'thriving' sex industry in on and off street prostitution and there has been a recent and rapid rise in on street prostitution featuring non British nationals, typically Eastern European, who are not drug users. There is very clear evidence that many of these were trafficked by highly organised crime networks and that some were very young, presumed under 18. They also identified a trend in women moving between on and off street prostitution, historically these have been perceived to be two separate demographics of women but this seems to no longer be the case.

They identified conflicting approaches by boroughs which can lead to chaotic treatment of women e.g. a women was served an ASBO which precluded her from entering the borough where she was accessing support services.

Enforcement action was categorically deemed as unhelpful in all cases as this focused mainly on women and not those who were purchasing sex and as such goes no way in addressing the causes of the problem.

The report mentions the cost of tackling these issues and the expense attached to managing the lifestyles of many of the women involved. Targeted services are recognised as having a long term cost saving, however, current service provision in this area is limited and many of the services that do exist are poorly funded and not readily available.

There seems to be mounting support to tackle men who purchase sex and moving away from criminalising women involved in these situations, this is seen as a shift in attitudes.

Other key findings included focusing resources into women only services, holistic support and ensuring women are asked questions such as 'would you like to exit prostitution?' 'What would you need to help you'. Currently 14 boroughs classify prostitution and trafficking as a form of

VAWG, this helps focus resources and fosters strategic thinking around the issues. There are pockets of good practice in London, for example Lambeth and Croydon.

### **Key recommendations**

- Recognising prostitution as for form of VAWG in order to adequately identify the harm inherent in prostitution and define sexual exploitation as a human rights violation that is profoundly gendered.
- An end to regressive police enforcement action, focusing instead on tackling demand (buyers) and the exploiters (pimps and traffickers)
- An end to the detention and criminalising of trafficked women
- Borough-based police with dedicated responsibility for P&T
- Training, awareness raising and dissemination of good practice guidance
- Improved joined-up, multi-agency working and tailored referral pathways
- In line with the Mayor's VAWG strategy, all boroughs to frame P&T as VAWG and develop dedicated strategies to address these issues
- A strategic lead/leads for London on P&T, facilitated by MOPAC.

### **4. Brothel closures policy – All**

The Westminster Sex Worker Taskforce has drafted a brothel closures protocol which sets out how the police should undertake brothel closures in consultation with 'sex workers' and 'sex worker' projects. YO explained that this is not policy yet but there is a proposal tabled by Councillor Rowley regarding how to implement brothel closures locally. This would mean that when a brothel is identified with criminal activity the women involved in prostitution within them will be notified and offered an intervention in advance of the brothel closure taking place. SG advocated Local Authorities having protocols in place and recommended the Panel feed into Westminster's proposal.

The Panel raised concerns over this model and in particular the fact that it may place women at risk. It was also questioned how plausible it would be for police to disclose information about covert operations particularly where there is suspected trafficking, sexual exploitation or other forms of organised crime, this could impact upon the police's ability to effectively disrupt criminal activity and is not therefore always going to be viable.

### **5. MPS update, Keith Niven**

DCS Keith Niven SCO2/5 Sexual Offences, Exploitation and Child Abuse Command updated the panel about three areas of Met work:

- Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) operating protocol

The CSE pan-London operating protocol has just been piloted in Camden and Lewisham over the summer and is now being rolled out to other London boroughs. 300/400 staff have now been trained to recognise signs of child sexual exploitation. The Met looked at referral categories into MASH from Health, schools etc. Where CSE is found to take place cases will be referred back to Met to seek prosecution. This approach is supported by boroughs.

ACPO are reviewing how missing persons are reported, new ways of working are proposed which would see wider Met engagement with agencies such as Health and Schools etc and neighbourhood officers engaging more closely with local children's care homes. Also proposed

is the creation of a Misper SPC role. Rollout is anticipated in 14/15, possibly sooner if recruitment issues can be sorted.

ML felt that VAWG agencies are not factored well enough in the protocol, neither are BME communities. There is evidence to suggest BME service users mostly disclose to BME agencies and would like to see further work in this area.

- FGM cases

In May the police and CPS reopened investigations into six London cases of alleged female genital mutilation in an effort to bring perpetrators to justice. The Crown Prosecution Service had previously ruled out charges over the incidents, which occurred between 2009 and 2012, on the grounds that there was insufficient evidence. The two agencies subsequently agreed to review the cases with Met detectives to see if new evidence can be gathered to allow prosecutions to be mounted.

Keith Niven updated on developments and said that despite legislation change in 2003 there has still been no successful prosecutions for FGM. The Met have engaged with many agencies but health and education need to facilitate joint working and become involved with an information exchange, maternity professionals in particular could help this.

Attempting to engage with schools has been very challenging and responses have been inconsistent. Issues include teachers not knowing what FGM is. The Met attended a symposium today asking for help and ideas around making inroads into school. They suggested possibly distributing the helpline number in schools.

SG said FGM is high on Mayoral agenda and has discussed pilot activity for the new year which may offer a borough the opportunity to enhance existing provision. He asked the Panel to send MOPAC any suggestion for specific areas of London which may be suited to the pilot.

JS asked about historic cases of FGM and how these are being handled by the Met. KN said there were eight cases which the Met are currently looking into, of which four were new cases.

Unfortunately three have yielded no evidence. In one case the victim did not support prosecution, they considered compelling the victim but felt this would not be in the public interest and may in fact put the victim's health at risk.

Proactive policing and covert operations were felt to be the way forward as this allows the Met to build a case that is not centred around the victim's prosecution evidence.

- Implementation of IPCC recommendations (Southwark Sapphire report)

Keith Niven provided an update on progress in implementing the recommendations of the IPCC report on the Southwark Sapphire Unit's local practices for the reporting and investigation of sexual offences, July 2008 – September 2009. He stated that reported rape is up by 30% which is taken as a good demonstration of confidence in the police.

Detection rate and charges are up by 18%, this goes to heart of IPCC report, which promotes moving from monitoring sanction detection rates towards charge rate. In response to feedback on victim service satisfaction the Met are currently looking at online service to work with ISVAs (contracts pending), ISVAs that have been consulted are happy to support this.

All Sapphire units have SOiT officers and much more supervision now. This is alongside clear guidance for withdrawal/retention of statements using a new more robust system.

SG said that the figures being quoted were very helpful and should feature at VAWG Panel as a matter of course.

JL asked whether DV homicides were increasing, SF explained that it is too soon to say as we were only half way through the year but that the trend is higher than this time last year. KN went on to explain that DV referrals to the CPS declined nationally and converse to this, London has seen an increase in referrals. The Met feel this can be attributed to things such as the SV courts and efforts around DV.

## 6. Updates from partners

The Home Office will rerun their teen relationship programme which works with TV and Media such as Hollyoaks and MTV.

The British Transport Police project Project Guardian is going well and currently undertaking lots of research, a report is due mid-October. All transport and First line officers have been specially trained to deal with cases of unwanted sexual behavior.

## 7. AOB

### Girls and Gangs strategic framework

YO gave a brief update on the girls and gangs strategic framework document explaining that MOPAC will publish.

MOPAC committed to develop a balanced VAWG scorecard for the VAWG strategy

<b>ACTION</b>	
MPS to provide a copy of their submission to the DPP to MOPAC and provide an update	
MOPAC to write to Cllr Ian Rowley re: draft brothel closures policy	
MPS to look into training for restorative justice in relation to domestic violence	