

## Violence against women and girls

- Reports of violence against women and girls in London are rising.
- The increase in reports should be seen as a success as more victims gain confidence to come forward.
- However, despite this good progress, violence against women and girls is significantly under-reported.
- The increase in reporting is placing resource pressure on the police and support services.
- Increased reporting has not translated into action against alleged perpetrators.
- The Mayor has a number of ways of helping to tackle violence against women and girls.
- The new Police and Crime Plan presents an opportunity for the Mayor to strengthen efforts to make London a safer place to live.

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is an umbrella term for a range of crimes, including domestic assault, rape, sexual offences, stalking, human trafficking for sexual exploitation and prostitution. It also includes harmful practices, such as forced marriage, so called 'honour' crimes and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

**In September 2016, the London Assembly Police and Crime Committee examined the detail behind the rise in reports of VAWG, support for victims and the ways in which partner organisations are working together to prevent it.**

The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) brings data together on the recording of domestic and sexual violence, victimisation and offending in its [domestic and sexual violence dashboard](#).

We have examined data from MOPAC and the Metropolitan Police (the Met) to assess the rise in reports of VAWG in London. We have also spoken to organisations working with victims to understand what more could be done to improve the way VAWG is tackled at present and how victims can be better supported. This report summarises the committee's key findings.

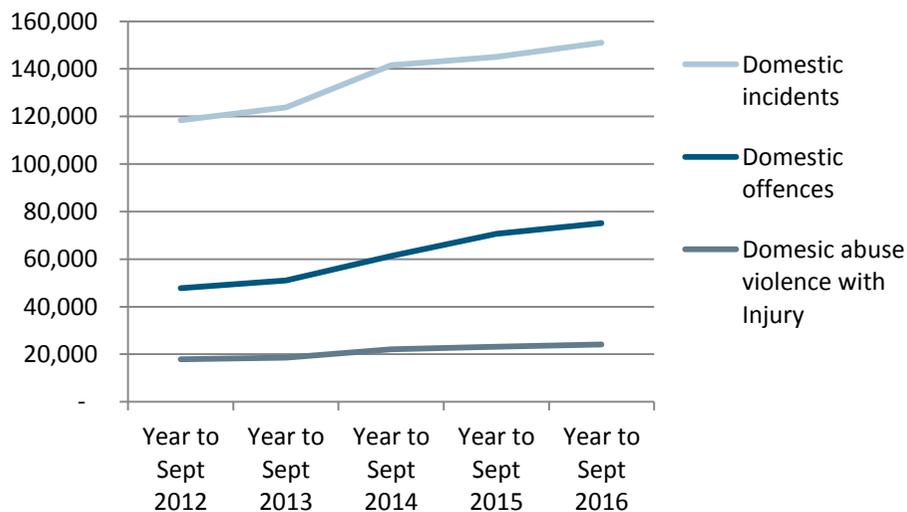
**The committee welcomes your thoughts and comments on violence against women and girls in London, to help us hold the Mayor and MOPAC to account. You can get in touch with the committee via [policeandcrimecommittee@london.gov.uk](mailto:policeandcrimecommittee@london.gov.uk).**

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### Reports of VAWG are rising

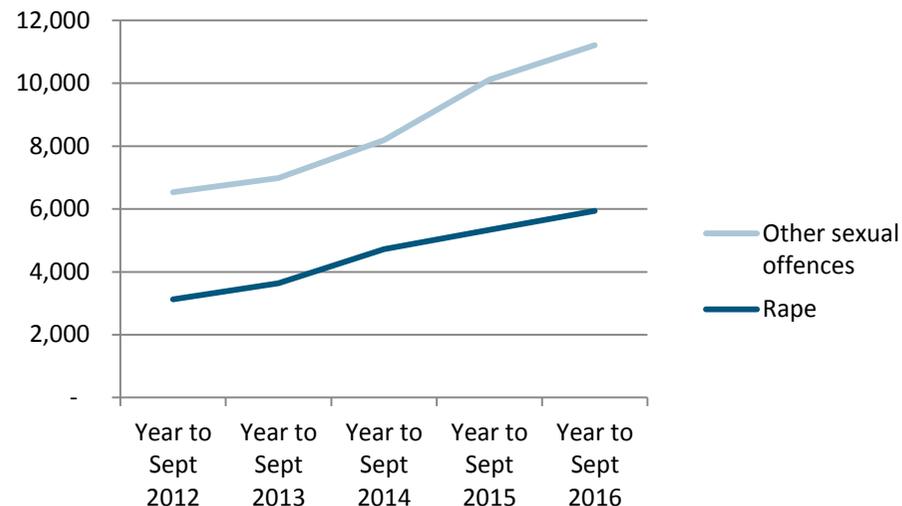
In London, reports of VAWG are rising. In the year to September 2016 there were over 150,000 domestic abuse incidents and over 17,000 sexual offences, including almost 6,000 rapes. Recorded domestic offences have increased by six per cent in the last year, and 57 per cent compared to four years ago. There has been an 11 per cent year on year increase in reported rapes and other sexual offences.<sup>1</sup>

### Domestic abuse has been rising year on year



Source: [MOPAC domestic and sexual violence dashboard](#)

### Reports of rape and other sexual offences are rising



Source: [MOPAC domestic and sexual violence dashboard](#)

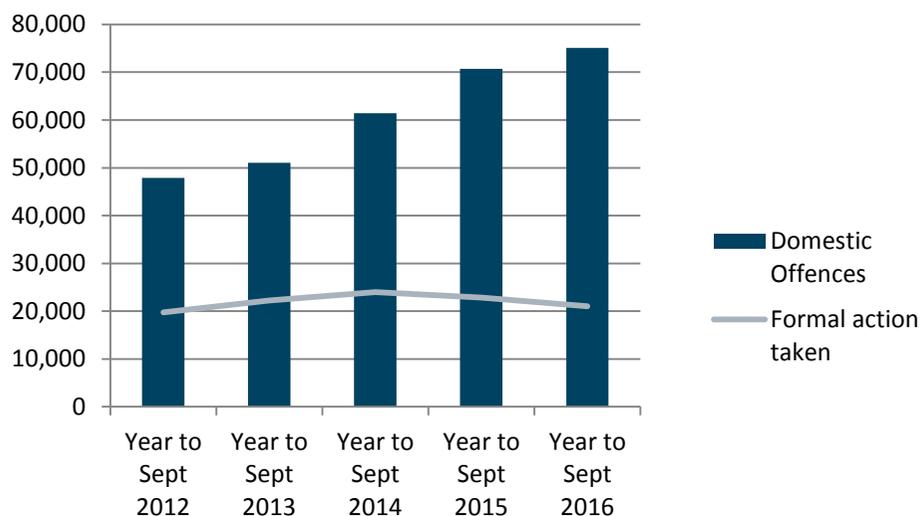
While reports of domestic abuse, rape and sexual offences are increasing, these crimes are still severely under-reported, making it hard to establish the full extent of VAWG in London. The [Mayor's VAWG Strategy](#) notes that all forms of VAWG are under-reported,<sup>2</sup> and the [Crime Survey of England and Wales](#), which helps to improve understanding of the nature and true level of crime, reports that "serious sexual violence is significantly under-reported by some 85 per cent."<sup>3</sup> Yvonne Traynor, Chief Executive, Rape Crisis South London, said that "only about one in ten women report it."<sup>4</sup> Supporting women and girls to have the confidence to report is vital.

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### Successful criminal justice outcomes for VAWG remain low

**Increased reporting has not translated into action against alleged perpetrators.** Despite increasing reports of **domestic offences**, the proportion of people that have had formal action (a charge, caution or other action) taken against them has fallen.<sup>5</sup> In the year to September 2016, only 28 per cent of notifiable domestic offences reported resulted in a charge, caution or other outcome. This compares to 41 per cent in the year to September 2012.<sup>6</sup>

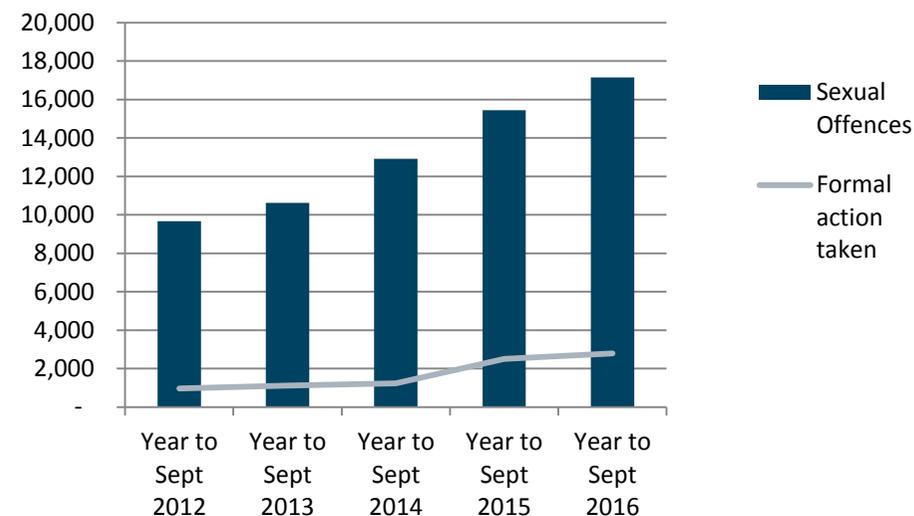
**While domestic offences are rising, the total number of people that have had formal action taken against them has remained fairly constant**



Source: [MOPAC domestic and sexual violence dashboard](#)

The picture is more encouraging when it comes to action taken against perpetrators of **sexual violence**. While this is still too low, it has been improving. In the year to September 2016, 16 per cent of sexual offences resulted in formal action. This compares to 10 per cent in the year to September 2012.<sup>7</sup>

### Sexual offences and action taken against perpetrators continues to rise



Source: [MOPAC domestic and sexual violence dashboard](#)

The increase in reports of domestic and sexual offences implies that confidence to report has risen. The fact that formal action taken is low suggests that the Met's resources have struggled to keep up with increased reports. As a result, complainant confidence in the police,

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which is hard won, can be undermined. The risk is that this may, in due course, reduce reporting, reversing the positive trends over the last few years.

### Responding to VAWG in London

**The Mayor can play a significant role in making London a safer city for women and girls.** He has made a public commitment to tackle VAWG and should provide visible leadership to ensure a joined up strategy across partners. Using his influence over the Met's budget, and his commissioning powers, he can drive service improvements and make sure policing and support services better meet demand.

#### *The Mayor's VAWG Strategy*

The previous Mayor launched London's first VAWG Strategy in 2010.<sup>8</sup> It was revised in November 2013 and runs through to 2017.<sup>9</sup> It has been described as "pioneering" and has led to "considerable changes in the frontline response to abuse."<sup>10</sup> The process of developing it has also been commended. Marai Larasi, Executive Director, Imkaan, said the involvement of women's organisations and survivors in the development of the last Strategy "was heavily rooted in survivors' voices." She said that "very often strategic documents are produced in the absence of, or are ignoring, the very voices of the people who are most affected by these particular issues."<sup>11</sup>

However, the Strategy has also been subject to criticism. For example, some say that the Strategy has not been "strong enough about the overlaps between different areas", for example, sexual and racial harassment in combination.<sup>12</sup>

The Strategy enabled a joined-up strategic approach to the different forms of abuse of women and girls. We were told that, before the Strategy, the response to VAWG in London was mainly to domestic violence, and did not address the other crimes now recognised as VAWG. We also heard that the response was limited and primarily about the criminal justice system.<sup>13</sup> Sarah Green, Co-director, End Violence Against Women Coalition, said that "this is not just a criminal justice issue ... the issue will never be solved just by making the police and the courts do it better. It is fundamentally about the rest of our public services and the way our schools in particular respond and the way the health service responds and the way social workers respond."<sup>14</sup>

While it is recognised that the Mayor's VAWG Strategy has enabled progress, the new Mayor must ensure its delivery plans meet its overall strategic vision. Sarah Green said that while the plans were "matching up" in terms of consistency, "maybe the delivery plans have not been as detailed and as thorough as they could have been in terms of making the Strategy and what is set out as the objectives achievable."<sup>15</sup> The new Police and Crime Plan provides an opportunity for the Mayor to re-double

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efforts to tackle VAWG in London and ensure detailed action plans are agreed to across the public services.

### *Commissioning of services*

The Mayor, through his Office for Policing and Crime, has both a “critical strategic role” and is a significant commissioner of services for victims of VAWG.<sup>16</sup> However, there are not enough services to meet London’s level of need and the Mayor could do more to drive improvements in service delivery.<sup>17</sup>

The Mayor has a number of ways in which he can use his influence and commissioning powers to support victims of VAWG. This includes: funding organisations that support victims of domestic abuse, rape and sexual offences; delivering on his promise to establish five child houses; and committing to long-term funding to ensure adequate accommodation to keep women and girls safe.

### *Rape and sexual assault*

The rise in reports of rape and sexual assault is expected to continue. Sarah Green told us that “there is a very profound social and cultural change happening in Britain of the survivors of abuse seeing that other people are being believed and thinking, ‘I do want to talk to somebody and I can see that someone might believe me’.”<sup>18</sup> The rise is putting an overwhelming pressure on services. We heard that support services have

not received proper investment and that the Met does not have the capacity and resources to provide a robust response and support to victims of rape in London. We heard that “the independent women’s voluntary sector, which will provide the support to women while going through the criminal justice system, very often is under-resourced and struggling to make sure women get that level of support required.”<sup>19</sup> The Mayor should protect and build on London’s network of support services.

The Mayor has said he intends to maintain the funding for London’s four rape crisis centres.<sup>20</sup> He has also said that he will work closely with the voluntary sector to assess how current services are functioning, identify gaps in provision and what needs to be done to meet future demand.<sup>21</sup> In our 2013 report, [Duty of care: improving support to victims of crime](#), we identified Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVAs) as an “example of good practice in victim care, where better provision across the capital would bring significant benefit to victims.”<sup>22</sup> We highlighted the importance of ISVAs in helping survivors and guiding them through the criminal justice process.

[The report of the Independent Review into the Investigation and Prosecution of rape in London](#) said ISVAs are “invaluable”.<sup>23</sup> It heard that there are “too few” ISVAs in London and recommended that the “Government should address the need for greater numbers and longer-

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term funding in order to meet levels of demand, increased resilience and stability of their services.”<sup>24</sup>

MOPAC told us that it has maintained its investment in ISVAs over the last two years, but that it “has a lack of clarity on numbers and also a lack of clarity on what we are defining as an ‘ISVA’ in terms of what multiple commissioners are putting in place in London.”<sup>25</sup> It said that its sexual violence needs assessment will give a “really clear picture of the number of ISVAs in London and the also the role and function they perform.”<sup>26</sup>

We heard that “if a survivor has an ISVA with them through the process, there is less of a chance of them dropping out. Our attrition rate is really quite high in sexual offence cases and, with an ISVA, that attrition rate is virtually zero.”<sup>27</sup> The Mayor should use his commissioning powers to ensure that every victim of a sexual offence is supported by an ISVA.

### *Tackling child sexual abuse*

High profile investigations and criminal trials have raised awareness of the possible widespread nature of child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSE). In 2014-15, reported child sexual offences were at their highest for a decade, and the increase is continuing. In our 2014 report, [Confronting Child Sexual exploitation in London](#), we highlighted that London has made significant developments in its response to CSE over the past few years, but concluded that “it is clear that more needs to be done to prevent and

tackle child sexual exploitation.”<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Yvonne Traynor told us that the Mayor’s current Strategy does not adequately address how best to tackle child sexual abuse.<sup>29</sup>

MOPAC and NHS England (London) have mapped the various care pathways for children and young people following sexual abuse.<sup>30</sup> The review found that services varied across London boroughs and identified gaps in medical, emotional support and the prosecution process. It recommended the establishment of five “Child Houses” in London by 2020.

‘Child Houses’ provide access to support for children suffering from the traumatising effects of abuse in a child focused environment. They provide medical and forensic examinations, criminal justice interventions, a remote video link to court, and long-term therapy for the child and their family, all in one place. These facilities help ensure consistent support for the victim and allow them to give evidence in a child friendly environment, instead of having to give evidence in court.

MOPAC has secured funding to implement the Child House model.<sup>31</sup> It anticipates that the number of children and young people referred for support will increase as public awareness is raised and agencies work better in partnership. The model is also expected to help speed up the judicial process, make it less traumatising and result in fewer failed cases.

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However, we have been told that specialist women's organisations with an understanding of VAWG should have been more involved during the development of the model.<sup>32</sup> This is a concern. Efforts to ensure specialist women's services are regularly informed and consulted, in particular when MOPAC and the Met are reviewing or making decisions, should be strengthened. The Mayor should use his influence to push for service improvements that draw on the knowledge and expertise of grass-roots services and organisations.

### *Domestic abuse*

There is huge pressure on domestic abuse services. We were told that specialist services have faced enormous cuts: in particular, BAME-specific services are living in a constant state of "anxiety around resources".<sup>33</sup> Sarah Green said that the cuts have led to commissioners favouring value over quality.<sup>34</sup> We heard that this might mean using organisations, "generic type providers", who are not specialist in VAWG and cannot always achieve the best outcomes for families.<sup>35</sup> This means that the organisations that do provide the best support for women and girls are unable to compete with these generic providers and are "haemorrhaging most".<sup>36</sup> The Mayor should support smart commissioning of services that bring together consortia of specialist women's organisations to take on contracts together, ensuring the best support for survivors of VAWG. Furthermore, there is a lack of safe and secure housing for victims of domestic abuse in London. Women's refuges continue to face pressure on

their services as demand outstrips supply, partly as a result of ongoing cuts to local funding and poor commissioning processes.<sup>37</sup> Refuges in London are being forced to turn away two in three women fleeing violence: twice the UK average.<sup>38</sup> It is also reported that there is a significant gap in terms of provision for young women and girls fleeing violence and abuse.<sup>39</sup>

London's housing crisis is also having an impact. We heard that women are having to stay in refuges longer than needed due to a lack of "moving on" accommodation.<sup>40</sup> This is "silting"<sup>41</sup> up the refuges and means that women are not receiving the support they require, are being put at risk and often have to go back to their abusive situation.

"What it means is that that bed space might be occupied by a woman who has had the support work done with her, who is ready to move on, but we cannot move her on because she has nowhere to go because our housing crisis means that effectively we cannot get her rehoused."

- Marai Larasi, Executive Director, Imkaan

During his election campaign, the Mayor said "it will be the job of the next Mayor to work with local authorities and voluntary groups to make sure a share of the new homes we deliver are made available to keep women and children safe, and support them in moving on to more stable accommodation."<sup>42</sup> It is essential he delivers on this promise.

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### *Harmful practices*

Harmful practices refer to forms of violence committed against women based on tradition, culture, custom and practice. There is no universal definition, nor is there an exhaustive list of harmful practices. The Mayor has said that he will “eliminate these unacceptable practices.”<sup>43</sup>

Harmful practices have historically been under-reported, and few cases come to the attention of the police. The current Mayoral VAWG Strategy reports that professionals are missing opportunities to identify girls at risk and prevent harmful practices and that “very few specialist services are available to prevent or respond to harmful practices in London, and those that do exist are under pressure.”<sup>44</sup> While addressing harmful practices is now a much higher priority among local services, the Mayor should use his influence to ensure sustainable funding to deliver specialist services for victims of harmful practices.

The previous Mayor established a pilot taskforce to confront harmful practices in London.<sup>45</sup> The two year pilot, started in April 2015, works across health, education, the voluntary sector and criminal justice agencies in five London boroughs: Tower Hamlets; Waltham Forest; Kensington and Chelsea; Hammersmith and Fulham; and Westminster. It aims to improve the way agencies identify and respond to harmful practices, focusing on community engagement, training for specialist staff

to work with victims and survivors of harmful practices, and work with the police to explore and improve its response to harmful practices.

Marai Larasi welcomed London’s approach to harmful practices.<sup>46</sup> She reported that the taskforce has been useful in testing what works at a local level and having different agencies work together. However, she also said that there is still work that needs to be done. This includes: ensuring agencies are equipped to respond appropriately; providing more training for teachers and other educational staff to increase understanding of FGM, forced marriage and honour-based violence; and holistic training for doctors and nurses.<sup>47</sup>

In December 2015, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) reported that “every police force must improve its understanding of honour-based violence, forced marriage and FGM.”<sup>48</sup> It said that “the police are not sufficiently prepared to protect effectively victims of honour-based violence” and despite “pockets of good practice, a lot needs to improve.”<sup>49</sup> It stressed the need to ensure officers are properly trained to identify cases of honour-based violence, and understand the appropriate approach to take. We were told that “the issue with the Met is not about what is being done but whether that is being done consistently.”<sup>50</sup> We heard that FGM has moved “up the agenda” of the Met and that there is good work being done, but there are real gaps.<sup>51</sup> Linking harmful practices to the wider context of VAWG, we want to see a

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“greater awareness among police officers of the broad range of violence against women and girls.”<sup>52</sup> More targeted training for police officers is, therefore, needed to raise awareness of harmful practices and the response required.

The new Police and Crime Plan must strengthen the Mayor’s commitment to tackling harmful practices in the capital. It should include a focus on increasing understanding of harmful practices across public service agencies and commit to the provision of dedicated and specialist support for survivors and those at risk.

### **More can be done to support survivors of VAWG in London**

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More can be done to respond to the increase in reports of VAWG in London. The new Police and Crime Plan provides a valuable opportunity to intensify efforts to do so. The Mayor committed to making work in this area “stronger and better”.<sup>53</sup> In his manifesto, he pledged to prioritise “a greater police presence on public transport at key times to clamp down on sexual assault, zero tolerance of domestic and sexual violence and [to] work closely with public sector and voluntary organisations on developing better support for victims of sexual and domestic violence.”<sup>54</sup> He must build on London’s current VAWG Strategy and deliver on his promises.

The Mayor must lead the response and conversation, regularly speak out about VAWG, and be a visible champion to end VAWG in London.<sup>55</sup> We want the Police and Crime Plan to:

- support women and girls to have the confidence to report VAWG
- ensure London’s VAWG strategy is adequately resourced and able to deliver on its priorities
- engage with the third sector – to understand the nature, needs and priorities of survivors in London
- protect and build on London’s network of specialist support services, and ensure the right resources in the right places
- support an increase in the number of ISVAs in London
- prioritise smart commissioning, including supporting consortiums of women’s organisations to come together
- address the shortage of safe and secure accommodation for victims of VAWG
- work with the Met to ensure adequate training for police officers on VAWG, and in particular, on harmful practices
- build on London’s response to harmful practices, including a focus on increasing understanding of harmful practices and provision of dedicated specialist support services.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> [MOPAC domestic and sexual violence dashboard](#)

<sup>2</sup> Mayor of London, [Mayoral strategy on violence against women and girls](#), November 2013

<sup>3</sup> See: Dame Elish Angiolini, [Report of the Independent Review into the investigation and prosecution of rape in London](#), 30 April 2015

<sup>4</sup> Yvonne Traynor, meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 8 September 2016

<sup>5</sup> Formal action, or People Proceeded Against (PPA), includes individuals charged for an offence, cautioned for an offence or those receiving another sanction for an offence.

This can include a formal warning, penalty notice or taking into consideration.

<sup>6</sup> [MOPAC domestic and sexual violence dashboard](#)

<sup>7</sup> [MOPAC domestic and sexual violence dashboard](#)

<sup>8</sup> Mayor of London, [The Way Forward – taking action to end violence against women and girls](#), March 2010

<sup>9</sup> Mayor of London, [Mayoral strategy on violence against women and girls](#), November 2013

<sup>10</sup> EAW and Imkaan, [London Elections, 5 May 2016 – Ending violence against women and girls in London: questions for candidates](#), April 2016

<sup>11</sup> Marai Larasi, meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 8 September 2016

<sup>12</sup> Marai Larasi, meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 8 September 2016

<sup>13</sup> Sarah Green, meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 8 September 2016

<sup>14</sup> Sarah Green, meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 8 September 2016

<sup>15</sup> Sarah Green, meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 8 September 2016

<sup>16</sup> Sarah Green, meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 8 September 2016

<sup>17</sup> Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 8 September 2016

<sup>18</sup> Sarah Green, meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 8 September 2016

<sup>19</sup> Marai Larasi, meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 8 September 2016

<sup>20</sup> Sadiq Khan, [Letter to EAW and Imkaan](#), 22 April 2016

<sup>21</sup> Sadiq Khan, [Letter to EAW and Imkaan](#), 22 April 2016

<sup>22</sup> Police and Crime Committee, [Duty of care: improving support to victims of crime](#), January 2013

<sup>23</sup> Dame Elish Angiolini, [Report of the Independent Review into the investigation and prosecution of rape in London](#), 30 April 2015

<sup>24</sup> Dame Elish Angiolini, [Report of the Independent Review into the investigation and prosecution of rape in London](#), 30 April 2015

<sup>25</sup> Sam Cunningham, meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 3 March 2016

<sup>26</sup> Sam Cunningham, meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 3 March 2016

<sup>27</sup> Yvonne Traynor, meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 8 September 2016

<sup>28</sup> Police and Crime Committee, [Confronting child sexual exploitation in London](#), March 2015

<sup>29</sup> Yvonne Traynor, meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 8 September 2016

<sup>30</sup> NHS England, [Review of pathway following sexual assault for children and young people in London – SUMMARY](#), March 2015

<sup>31</sup> MOPAC, [PCD 39 – Home Office Police Innovation Fund – Child House](#), July 2016

<sup>32</sup> Marai Larasi, meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 8 September 2016

<sup>33</sup> Marai Larasi, meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 8 September 2016

<sup>34</sup> Sarah Green, meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 8 September 2016

<sup>35</sup> Sarah Green, meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 8 September 2016

<sup>36</sup> Sarah Green, meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 8 September 2016

<sup>37</sup> The Guardian, [Domestic violence refuge provision at crisis point, warn charities](#), August 2014

<sup>38</sup> Sisters Uncut, [Sisters Uncut picket City Hall to demand Sadiq save London's disappearing domestic violence services](#), May 2016

<sup>39</sup> Mayor of London, [Mayoral strategy on violence against women and girls](#), November 2013

<sup>40</sup> Marai Larasi, meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 8 September 2016

<sup>41</sup> Marai Larasi, meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 8 September 2016

<sup>42</sup> Sadiq Khan, [Letter to EAW and Imkaan](#), 22 April 2016

<sup>43</sup> Sadiq Khan, [Letter to EAW and Imkaan](#), 22 April 2016

<sup>44</sup> Mayor of London, [Mayoral strategy on violence against women and girls](#), November 2013

<sup>45</sup> DMPCD 2015 10, [Harmful Practices Pilot grant awards](#), 26 January 2015

<sup>46</sup> Marai Larasi, meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 8 September 2016

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<sup>47</sup> Marai Larasi, meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 8 September 2016

<sup>48</sup> HMIC, [The depths of dishonour: Hidden voices and shameful crimes](#), December 2015

<sup>49</sup> HMIC, [The depths of dishonour: Hidden voices and shameful crimes](#), December 2015

<sup>50</sup> Marai Larasi, meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 8 September 2016

<sup>51</sup> Marai Larasi, meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 8 September 2016

<sup>52</sup> Marai Larasi, meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 8 September 2016

<sup>53</sup> Sadiq Khan, [Letter to EAW and Imkaan](#), 22 April 2016

<sup>54</sup> Sadiq Khan, [Manifesto: a safer and more secure London](#)

<sup>55</sup> Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 8 September 2016