

Overview & Scrutiny

Room 118, 2nd Floor
Hackney Town Hall
Mare Street
London, E8 1EA

12th March 2026
craig.player@hackney.gov.uk

To:

Cllr Susan Fajana-Thomas, Community Safety Partnership Chair and Cabinet Member for Community Safety & Regulatory Services
Diane Benjamin, Director of Children & Families Service and VAWG Strategic Board Chair

Eliminating Violence Against Women & Girls Strategy 2025-29 (Suggestions for Improvement)

The Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission's remit includes scrutinising matters relating to community safety in the borough, and it has a statutory duty to scrutinise the Community Safety Partnership as the Crime and Disorder Committee.

As one of the strategic priorities identified in the Community Safety Partnership Plan, the Commission reviewed the progress made in delivering the priorities and actions outlined in the [Eliminating Violence Against Women & Girls \(VAWG\) Strategy 2022-25](#) at its meeting on 23rd September 2025.

With the [refreshed strategy](#) agreed in November 2025, this was seen as a timely and helpful discussion which gave members an opportunity to input into the emerging strategies for 2025-29 and how they might be delivered at an early stage.

The video recording, alongside the agenda papers and minutes, provide a public record of the meeting.

- Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission 23rd September 2025: [video recording](#), [agenda papers](#) and [minutes](#)

As part of the scrutiny process, the Commission also held a [focus group](#) with third sector providers of specialist VAWG support services to hear about their views on the progress made and what they might like to see happen going forward.

The Commission would firstly like to place on record its thanks to those officers in the Domestic Abuse Prevention Service (DAIS), Community Safety, Housing Services, Children & Education, Benefits & Homelessness Prevention and Adult Social Care who engaged with us on this piece of work.

Overview & Scrutiny

Similarly, we would like to thank our partners across the Met Police Central East Borough Command Unit, City & Hackney Probation, NHS North East London and Emece Women's Centre for their valuable contributions to this piece of work.

The Commission would also like to thank you both in your capacities, as both portfolio holders and respective chairs of the Community Safety Partnership and VAWG Strategic Board, for your contributions and ongoing engagement with the scrutiny process.

Finally, we thank the third sector providers of specialist VAWG support services who shared their views and experiences with us. Their engagement with the scrutiny process is a testament to their commitment to championing the issues that matter to them, and we recognise the instrumental role that they play in supporting victims / survivors.

On the evidence provided and through consultation with officers, members of the Commission have outlined their findings and made 15 suggestions for improvement or requests for further information for your consideration, which it is hoped will contribute further to the positive work that is already taking place.

We look forward to receiving your response in due course.

Yours sincerely

Councillor Joseph Ogundemuren

Vice-Chair, Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission

Cc:

- Detective Chief Superintendent Britanny Clarke, Community Safety Partnership Statutory Officer Group Co-Chair
- Dawn Carter-McDonald, Community Safety Partnership Statutory Officer Group Co-Chair
- Rickardo Hyatt, Group Director Housing, Climate & Economy
- Geeta Subramaniam-Mooney, Director of Environment and Climate Change
- Gerry McCarthy, Assistant Director Community Safety & Regulatory Services
- Maurice Mason, Community Safety Manager
- Cathal Ryan, DAIS Service Manager
- Eleanora Serafini, DAIS Domestic Abuse Housing Specialist
- Donna Thomas, Assistant Director, Early Years, Early Help & Wellbeing
- Pauline Adams, Principal Head of Service Early Help & Prevention
- James Sykes, Quality Assurance & Training Officer (Education)
- Helena Stephenson, Acting Director Tenancy & Homeownership Services
- Wayne Hylton, ASB & Estate Safety Manager
- Carol Gayle, Strategic Lead Benefits & Homelessness Prevention
- Georgina Diba, Director of Adults Social Work & Operational Services
- Beverley Grayley, Deputy Head of Complex Care and Safeguarding
- Yasmin Lalani, Central East BCU Detective Chief Inspector Public Protection
- Stephanie Salmon, Head of City & Hackney Probation

Overview & Scrutiny

- Mary O'Reardon, Designated Lead for Adult Safeguarding NHS North East London
- Mary Lee, Designated Lead for Safeguarding Children North East London
- Cigdem Aslan, VAWG Service Manager Imece Women's Centre
- Jason Davis, Acting Head of Policy & Strategic Delivery
- Ben Bradley, Head of Mayor and Cabinet Office
- Lucy Cobb, Head of Chief Executive's Office

Suggestions for improvement

The Commission recognises the strong commitment and dedication that the Council, statutory services and partners across the community safety, health and social care, housing and third sectors have shown to addressing VAWG and domestic abuse (DA) in Hackney over recent years.

Since 2022 significant progress has been made against the priority areas identified in the 2022-25 strategy. This includes work by Young Hackney in schools and youth hubs with young people tackling misogyny and problematic attitudes, joint working between community safety partners to identify problem locations and make them safer, strong casework collaboration between the Council's DAIS, specialist VAWG services and other partners, and delivering more 'by and for' services for Black and Global Majority women.

Having said this, more must be done to build on that progress and eliminate violence and against women and girls and DA in all its forms. Whilst it is important to celebrate success and good practice, the reality is that VAWG is still widespread across Hackney, and its impact on victims / survivors is profound and long-lasting. Responses must match the scale and urgency of the intersecting challenges victims / survivors face.

Tackling VAWG is a collective responsibility, and we should work collaboratively and innovatively across the borough to achieve the objectives of the new strategy for 2025 onwards. We must build on Hackney's strong multi-agency approach to identify abuse, protect victims / survivors and hold perpetrators to account, keeping victims / survivors at the centre and maintaining long-term investment in the services that help them rebuild their lives.

The new strategy for 2025-29 comes at a time of considerable policy and legislative change, and we are keen to see how it is delivered in alignment with both local and national policy. This includes the forthcoming review of the Community Safety Partnership and subsequent strategic plan for 2026 onwards, as well as the London Mayor's VAWG Strategy, the Metropolitan Police Service VAWG Action Plan Update 2025 and the new national strategy for addressing VAWG.

We also recognise the funding parameters set by the Government which make it challenging for statutory agencies like the Council and specialist VAWG support services to plan their services and support all residents who are affected by VAWG and DA. The Commission believes that strong leadership must come from central government to tackle violence against women and girls, backed by adequate and long-term funding for local delivery.

Overview & Scrutiny

Raising awareness and developing practice

Throughout the 2022-25 strategy, Hackney's VAWG partnership has worked together more effectively as part of a whole-system approach. The Council's DAIS has worked hard to convene and secure the commitment of all relevant departments, partner agencies and third sector organisations and the governance in place has, on the whole, ensured that stakeholders are pulling in the same direction.

Having said this, there is more to do. A true 'stronger system' approach means that every person and every organisation understands the role they play. Effective communication across and within services at all levels was highlighted to us as particularly vital to ensuring an effective whole-system approach, as was the importance of clear and consistent data and effective information sharing.

During the 2022-2025 strategy the local partnership did not reach a shared data set regarding all casework and referrals with third sector agencies specialising in DA and VAWG, the police and other statutory agencies. At present, local agencies only gather and report on data internally and to commissioners of services.

Whilst challenging, we would expect the new strategy's implementation plan to include tangible actions to improve how the partnership collects, analyses, and uses data on VAWG in order to track what is happening across the range of protected characteristics. Enhancing our approach to data is integral to improving understanding of VAWG, targeting interventions and making more informed policy decisions.

A significant challenge has been and continues to be data sharing between the police and other agencies. We were told that a lack of robust, accurate data collection and effective, timely sharing by the police had, for example, impacted the VAWG partnership's ability to analyse hotspots and premises where serious sexual offenses occur in order to intervene preventatively.

Clearly, poor-quality police data and ineffective information sharing processes significantly limits the partnership's understanding of perpetrators and victims and presents barriers to delivering more joined-up services. The inability to access key data and information may lead to decision-making based on a partial picture of the issue at hand and can also mean that vital signs of risk or vulnerability are missed.

We recognise the police's efforts to utilise the integrated 'Connect' IT system which has been rolled-out to bring together policing data and improve access and input through one interface. Going forward, we hope that this system can be used more effectively at a local level to enable more efficient and automated information sharing not only across forces but also across agencies to prevent and tackle VAWG.

We also recognise the importance of a shared understanding across Hackney of how to recognise the signs that someone is being harmed by VAWG or DA and confidently signposting, referring and supporting those in need or at risk. It is important that we support

Overview & Scrutiny

professionals to learn about DA and VAWG and develop their knowledge and skills so they can play their part in preventing and tackling it.

We were therefore pleased to hear that a comprehensive training programme was provided by DAIS to professionals on a range of key issues, particularly the expansion of the cultural and community training offer to ensure interventions and support are delivered in a sensitive and helpful way. Feedback from those trained has been positive, and we would like to see this built upon going forward to ensure wider, ongoing, quality training across all forms of VAWG which is tailored to the needs of particular services / organisations.

More generally, it is important that the Council continues to deliver campaigns and promotes awareness of what constitutes DA and VAWG, statutory and specialist services so that victims / survivors can access support in a way they feel best suits their needs, and shows that DA and gender-based violence are not tolerated in Hackney and can result in serious consequences for those who cause harm. It was encouraging to see a continued focus on this in the new strategy.

Messaging should be tailored and targeted, recognising that DA and speech, language and communication needs are often intertwined. Having speech, language and communication needs may prevent victims / survivors from understanding what has happened to them, communicating it to others and accessing services and support, and perpetrators from accessing rehabilitation and prevention programmes.

We feel assured that there are strong governance arrangements in place through the VAWG Strategic Board to oversee the delivery of the new strategy, hold decision-makers to account, and ensure other key organisations and groups are able to scrutinise progress. Having said this, public accountability is equally important and we feel that the publication of an annual report on progress would offer us, other key stakeholders and the public an opportunity to scrutinise the delivery of the strategy.

The Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) uses strong partnership working to address high-risk DA, and the VAWG Operational Group (made up of statutory services and third sector organisations) is a positive, constructive forum enabling active participation by third sector agencies. The introduction of sub-groups to focus on specific issues like harmful practices, sexual exploitation and housing has developed and strengthened a culture of continuous system improvement.

Having said this, specialist providers who attended our focus group told us that they would like to see more physical meetings with statutory services to enable collaboration and foster trust. We would encourage more VAWG Operational Group and sub-group meetings to be held in person, recognising the benefits face-to-face meetings can have on building stronger relationships, improving communication, and boosting collaboration and creativity.

The Commission therefore suggests that the VAWG Strategic Board:

Overview & Scrutiny

- 1) Sets out the actions that will be taken to improve the local approach to data collection and sharing on VAWG, and in particular to reach a shared data set regarding all casework and referrals with third sector organisations, the police and other statutory agencies.
- 2) Sets out the actions that Central East Borough Command Unit specifically will take to enable more efficient and automated information sharing data on VAWG with key agencies and third sector organisations, building on and utilising the new integrated 'Connect' IT system.
- 3) Creates and publishes an annual report highlighting performance and impact over the previous year of the Eliminating VAWG Strategy, as a means of supporting accountability and transparency and offering key stakeholders and the public an opportunity to track progress.
- 4) Ensures that a minimum number of VAWG Operational Group and sub-group meetings are held in person each year, in recognition of the benefits face-to-face meetings can have on building stronger relationships, improving communication and boosting collaboration and creativity.

Preventing VAWG and tackling misogyny

Effective prevention starts with education, and the Council has worked hard in recent years to support and develop a culture in which teachers and pupils across Hackney's schools and educational settings have the knowledge and confidence to build respectful relationships and challenge harmful behaviours.

Young Hackney and Hackney Education, with input from DAIS, have provided toolkits and training for staff and students across a number of schools on recognising and responding to misogynistic behaviour and promoting safe relationships, helping them to address concerns and have conversations about what sorts of behaviours are inappropriate and/or illegal.

Whilst clear progress has been made since 2022, there is further to go in this respect and particularly to ensure preventive approaches to VAWG and tackling misogyny are consistent across all schools. We were told that there were inconsistencies in how schools see their role and understand what constitutes concerning attitudes and behaviours - particularly for independent schools who are not required to follow the national curriculum.

We recognise that the Council has limited power over independent and non-maintained schools, with these schools not being subject to local authority control in areas like their curriculum. Nonetheless, we feel it is important that the Council proactively reaches out to those schools to encourage them to join the drive to tackle misogyny at all levels and empower them to address any form of VAWG that they may encounter at their respective establishments.

Overview & Scrutiny

We support the new strategy's commitment to preventing future DA by intervening assertively to challenge and support families where aggression or violence occurs. A child's views of how to behave towards others is largely shaped by their experiences in the family, and such adverse childhood experiences can negatively impact their attitudes on gender roles and future behaviour within relationships. Early intervention can therefore play an important role in developing safe and positive attitudes and behaviours in later life.

The 'Safe and Together' approach within the Children & Families Service, which involves supporting the non-offending parent, holding to account the offending parent and intervening to address perpetrator pattern behaviour already, has a proven track record in reducing risk to children. This approach must continue to be supported and expanded where possible.

We feel that it is important to emphasise that parenting after DA can be extremely challenging, whether a victim / survivor is navigating child contact with an abusive ex-partner, managing a child's emotional responses, or trying to find a way to manage the impact of trauma.

Interventions must seek to understand how DA has interfered with the parenting process, restore the victim / survivor's confidence, and provide additional support for them and their children. This includes helping families to navigate a complex landscape of potential support offers to make sure they can get quick access to the services they need.

One of the previous strategy's intended outcomes, and a continued priority for women and girls in the borough, is that they are made to feel safe in public and online spaces. The Council, the police and other key stakeholders such as housing providers play a key role in doing so and ensuring that, where concerns have been identified, action is taken.

We heard about the positive work undertaken between Community Safety, DAIS and the police to reduce the risk of further harm occurring in areas or settings which have been identified as one where women and girls have been harmed, such as public outreach, enhanced enforcement presence, leafleting / posters and deployment of CCTV. Such interventions often rely on reliable and timely police data and intelligence, again highlighting the importance of effective information sharing.

We heard that online and digital platforms are being increasingly used to perpetrate VAWG, giving perpetrators more opportunities to invade someone's privacy or control their behaviour. The Online Safety Act 2023 introduced a clearer, more consistent legal framework for online offences and practical measures platforms can take to tackle online harms that disproportionately affect women and girls, but technology evolves faster than legislation and perpetrators quickly find new ways to exploit them.

Many digital tools leave little visible trace, which can make it difficult to prove it is happening. The police told us that they are making efforts locally to adapt and develop technology to evidence online incidents, and whilst this is encouraging, there is clearly a need to balance victims' / survivors' needs (e.g. not taking away their phones or other electronic devices) with evidence gathering to investigate and prosecute perpetrators.

Overview & Scrutiny

Whilst we recognise that online and digital abuse is a complex issue, we are keen to understand what the Council and partners are doing to raise awareness of what digital abuse looks like, provide confidential support through the DAIS and other specialist services, and promote online safety and help people secure their devices.

We support the new strategy's greater emphasis on working alongside licensed premises in the Night Time Economy to prevent harassment or abuse and ensure action is taken where women and girls have been harmed in those settings. Ultimately, those premises and all staff involved in them have a responsibility to be vigilant and act when harassment or abuse takes place in their venues.

All owners / license holders and their staff should have an awareness of VAWG issues. The Council's Night Time Economy team already delivers monthly free training to nightlife staff. The Hackney Nights accreditation scheme sets a standard for nightlife venues, asking venues to adopt a zero tolerance approach to all forms of misogyny and sexual offences and to adhere to the Mayor of London's Women's Night Safety Charter.

It is vital that all premises operating in the borough engage with the Council and other agencies to take up that training, participate in schemes and improve physical security. This is as well as having their own procedures in place to ensure victims / survivors are given support when incidences occur and that their staff encourage the reporting of harassment and abuse and support the police to identify, apprehend and sanction perpetrators.

The Commission therefore suggests that the VAWG Strategic Board:

- 5) Develops an action plan setting out how Hackney Education will proactively engage all independent and non-maintained schools to encourage them to join the drive to tackle misogyny at all levels and empower them to address any form of VAWG that they may encounter at their respective establishments.
- 6) Sets out how children and families will be supported where aggression or violence occur to develop safe and positive parenting, recognising that parenting can be extremely challenging whether a victim / survivor is navigating child contact with an abusive ex-partner, managing a child's emotional responses or trying to find a way to manage the impact of trauma.
- 7) Sets out how DAIS, Community Safety and the Central East Borough Command Unit will work collaboratively alongside licenced premises in the Night Time Economy to prevent harassment or abuse and ensure action is taken where women and girls have been harmed in those settings.
- 8) Develops an engagement plan to raise awareness of what online and digital facilitated VAWG looks like, provide confidential support through the DAIS and other specialist services and promote online safety and help people secure their devices.

Overview & Scrutiny

Supporting victims / survivors of VAWG

Having spoken directly with providers of specialist by and for services, we appreciate the unique role they play in tackling the barriers facing the marginalised communities they support and the specific expertise they have in meeting their needs. These services must be championed, empowered and adequately resourced as far as possible.

Local data tells us that Black and Global Majority residents are more likely to be referred to DAIS than the general Hackney population, and that Black women of African and Caribbean heritage in particular are disproportionately harmed as a result of high-risk DA.

Whilst not unexpected, given that Black and Global Majority residents are disproportionately affected by systemic racism, class and trauma and that inequalities intersect with violence against women and girls, this highlights the ongoing need for victims / survivors and their children to have greater access to by and for services within the borough.

We were therefore pleased to hear that since 2023 the Council has been commissioning Imece Women's Centre to deliver a specialist, dedicated service delivered by and for Black women of African and Caribbean heritage, and that the Mayor's Office for Police & Crime (MOPAC) has agreed funding to continue that offer until 2029.

Our focus group with specialist providers highlighted that victims / survivors with insecure immigration status and/or no recourse to public funds may not feel comfortable reporting experiences of VAWG, and may be less likely to access support. We were therefore pleased to hear about local efforts to enhance the provision of services working with refugee or asylum seeking women and children, particularly those placed in hotel accommodation.

We welcome a focus on challenging and supporting agencies to recognise and respond not only to DA and VAWG but also to victims / survivors' protected characteristics and additional vulnerabilities in the new strategy and the ways in which these intersect with and compound the harm being perpetrated against them.

Clearly, this should include victims / survivors with insecure immigration status and/or no recourse to public funds and we do have some concerns that these victims / survivors still might not be reporting their experiences of VAWG to the police, out of fear that they will prioritise immigration control over their protection and safety.

In our conversations with the police, we were assured that their services are provided to victims / survivors irrespective of immigration status, and that they do not routinely search databases to establish an individual's status or share their status with the Home Office - unless that individual has been flagged as wanted, in which case the police is required by law to report it.

It was acknowledged, however, that there is too often a perceived barrier by victims / survivors with unstable status or those undergoing application processes which may make them less likely to report their experiences of VAWG to the police. This is being addressed in

Overview & Scrutiny

part through those by and for services which advocate for those with insecure immigration status and provide impartial advice and guidance, although their capacity to meet demand is increasingly limited.

More needs to be done by the police itself to assure victims / survivors with insecure immigration status and/or no recourse to public funds that they will be treated fairly and safely should they experience VAWG. We feel there should be a greater focus on police engagement in the borough to break down barriers with migrant communities through regular outreach work and targeted messaging.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognises children as victims in their own right. VAWG and DA are harmful to children, and can put children at risk of harm, whether they are subjected to abuse themselves, witness one of their parents being violent or abusive to the other parent, or live in a home in which it is perpetrated.

As already mentioned, we support a focus on acting before someone harms or is harmed, which starts in the home as children, and continues outside of the homes in young people's first relationships. Having said this, where children do experience DA at home or in their family, we must ensure that they receive an effective response from key agencies and specialist services, including opportunities to identify and intervene early, the crisis response and ongoing support.

Good progress has already been made throughout the lifetime of the previous strategy to identify and intervene early and improve multi-agency responses to child victims. This includes a consistent, 'whole family' approach to casework through the DAIS and Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), as well as the beforementioned 'Safe and Together' approach used within the Children & Families Service.

However, given the [recent findings of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner](#) which highlights that the wider response to children does not yet meet their unique needs, we feel that a more strident approach should be taken in respect of improving the ongoing support available to child victims across their entire timeline to ensure that they receive an effective response across both statutory and non-statutory services. Recovery services are critical to support children (as well as their non-offending parent) to recover, heal and make sense of the abuse that they have experienced as they transition to adulthood.

We came away with a sense that there was somewhat limited recovery and ongoing support available to child victims themselves and, in particular, therapeutic support to help children recover from trauma. The need for consistent responses that meet their unique needs across both statutory and non-statutory services was highlighted to us in our focus group with specialist services.

Where children who have experienced DA have a specific mental health need (recognising that not all children will), Children & Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) should be best placed to offer targeted clinical support to meet those needs. We were told, however,

Overview & Scrutiny

increasing demand for CAMHS has led to long waiting lists and referrals being declined due to the high thresholds for support.

Where a child or young person needs therapeutic support as a result of VAWG but does not have a diagnosed mental health condition, this should instead be delivered by a specialist community-based service. We feel that there may be a gap in provision here, which fails to recognise the importance of this service type in meeting capacity and children's individual needs.

Whilst we understand that resources are limited, and that commissioning decisions are subject to robust local needs assessments, we feel there may be scope to directly commission more community-based therapeutic support for child victims in the borough. This should include one-to-one and group-based therapeutic support for children themselves, as well as with their non-offending parent as a means of addressing the impact of VAWG on their relationship.

With regard to future resourcing levels, we are supportive of ongoing lobbying efforts to ensure appropriate levels of funding which supports a more comprehensive approach to the wellbeing of our children and young people. This is particularly important as national government begins to work with local leaders and the specialist support sector on implementation planning for the new national VAWG strategy, a key aspect of which will be prevention and early intervention.

VAWG can also have a severe and long-lasting impact on the mental health of adult victims / survivors, who often find it difficult to access the support they need. We were pleased to see this recognised in the refreshed strategy, and a commitment made to ensuring victims / survivors experiencing multiple disadvantages are supported holistically and effectively. We are keen to understand what this will look like in practice.

We recognise there is a broad spectrum of severity and types of mental health problems and the impact will vary between individuals. However, it was clear from our conversations with both statutory and specialist services that there are common barriers, concerns and gaps in accessing holistic statutory and non-statutory mental health support.

Despite the strong association, we were told that VAWG services are not always equipped to support mental health problems and additional vulnerabilities like substance misuse. VAWG workers are frequently identifying mental health needs, but due to a lack of mental health services to refer people onto, are often providing low level psychological support - despite not being funded for training in such interventions.

Improving links between the DA and mental health sectors should enable practitioners to make better assessments and referrals. Pathways and services need to be easier to navigate for professionals and victims / survivors themselves, and sufficiently joined-up so that those experiencing mental health problems are not 'bounced around' different services.

Overview & Scrutiny

Safe and secure housing is a critical foundation for safety, recovery and long-term independence for victims and survivors of VAWG and their children, and we recognise the specific challenges faced by victims / survivors who wish to remain safely within their social home, yet share a joint tenancy with their perpetrator.

These victims and survivors are often dependent on perpetrators voluntarily removing themselves from the joint tenancy and, if unable to achieve this, they can face significant legal barriers which can leave them homeless and carrying the economic, practical and emotional burden of starting again.

Whilst we recognise that progress is needed at national level to improve guidance on supporting victims / survivors in joint tenancies and to change the law, we are committed to exploring how local approaches could be developed to make victims / survivors safer. This was explored in detail at the Commission's recent meeting on [21st January 2026](#), and our findings and recommendations will be shared in due course.

The Commission therefore suggests that the VAWG Strategic Board:

- 9) Develops an engagement plan to break down the barriers between the police and migrant communities which may be preventing victims / survivors with insecure immigration status and/or no recourse to public funds from reporting their experiences of VAWG, for example through regular police outreach and targeted messaging.
- 10) Sets out its plans for ensuring the voices and experiences of children and young people who are victims of domestic abuse are listened to, understood and captured by agencies and practitioners to ensure they are represented at both an operational and strategic level in all areas.
- 11) Commissions community-based therapeutic support for child victims in the borough, including one-to-one and group-based therapeutic support for children and young people themselves, in addition to support for their non-offending parent as a means of addressing the impact of domestic abuse on their relationship.
- 12) Sets out how it will improve joint working between the VAWG and mental health sectors to enable practitioners to make better assessments and referrals, for pathways and services to be easier to navigate for professionals and victims / survivors themselves and to ensure that those experiencing mental health problems are not 'bounced around' different services.

Holding perpetrators to account and reducing harm

In order to eliminate VAWG and to prevent future incidences of abuse, it is vital that perpetrators are held to account for their actions. At a basic level, this means that perpetrators of all forms of VAWG should be held accountable by the criminal justice system (CPS) and face the consequences of their actions.

Overview & Scrutiny

In the first instance, the VAWG must be policed more effectively. In our discussions with the Police, it was acknowledged that historically low charging and prosecution rates for DA and sexual violence act as a deterrent to reporting and posed risks to victims. Significant improvement in this respect is still needed, particularly around the effective use of intelligence, data and technology.

Whilst the Police play a central role in this, all CJS agencies must work together to improve investigation, detection, charging, prosecution rates and sentencing outcomes. We were therefore pleased to hear a whole system approach is being embedded in Hackney to gather evidence, build strong case files, and address any actions required by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to prevent case discontinuation.

Locally, positive progress has been made to enhance and increase CPS referrals, with earlier referrals leading to a higher likelihood of charges, and improved and closer working with CPS colleagues is addressing case file quality issues more quickly. Having said this, challenges still remain and more focus needs to be given to how new and existing technologies can be better harnessed to identify and pursue perpetrators.

It is important to highlight that central to providing better justice outcomes for all victims / survivors is improving their experience through the CJS. Delays across the CJS means many victims and survivors wait too long to receive practical support as well as resolution and justice. Concerningly, a recent [London Victims' Commissioner's report](#) stated that 59% of DA and 74% for rape crime victims in London drop out, compared to 40% for all crimes.

More frequent, better communication from the police, the CPS and CJS agencies is essential to ensuring victims and survivors feel informed and cared for throughout their journey through the justice system. We were told that some of the common reasons for this high attrition rate include concerns about officers not treating victims with respect, lack of follow-up, and perceived inadequate service after reporting.

We were encouraged to hear that action is being taken locally to ensure stronger and more consistent engagement with victims and survivors. This includes a quality call-back system where senior officers call victims to assess officer politeness, response times and whether victims felt listened to, and the mapping of victim statements against crime reports to ensure accurate records and address discrepancies.

Where perpetrators have been charged, it is vital that they are managed effectively by the police, probation services and wider CJS to reduce the risk they pose and that attempts are made to address their behaviour on a long-term basis.

We heard about the unique system in Hackney for receiving overnight records of perpetrators in cells, allowing for quick action and cross-referencing between probation services and other agencies, and designated single points of contact for VAWG exist across the unit to manage difficult cases. Statutory offending behaviour programmes are in place, and practitioners are encouraged to refer individuals to council services as they transition to non-statutory status.

Overview & Scrutiny

However, providers of specialist VAWG support services told us that police and probation services need to take increased proactive measures against offenders once they are back in the community. We are keen for the police to continue to use all measures and orders available to reduce the risk offenders pose post-conviction, including the consistent enforcement of protection orders and license conditions.

We note the UK Government's pledges to increase investment in probation and community support services, and hope that this funding will be fully utilised locally to support expanded electronic monitoring, additional staffing and accommodation, ensuring offenders are closely tracked, supported, and managed effectively - from first-time offenders to higher-risk perpetrators.

Alongside a robust CJS it is important that perpetrators have access to programmes and interventions in the community to reduce the risk they pose to women and girls. It is also important to recognise that pursuing a criminal justice outcome is not always what victims / survivors want, and behaviour change interventions should be available regardless of CJS involvement.

We heard that targeted perpetrator interventions that challenge harmful attitudes and support behaviour change can be instrumental in preventing further harm. We were pleased to hear that the DAIS has a well-established behaviour change programme in place for those that are able to engage with it, offered on both a group work and individual basis.

The success of this approach has been recognised by Hackney becoming the only local authority in the UK to receive dual accreditation for its perpetrator behaviour change programme and its intensive case management approach to manage and disrupt those that cannot engage in a behaviour change programme to reduce the risk they pose.

Clearly, statutory and third sector agencies must work holistically with those who harm others as part of a whole-system approach to reducing offending, and we were pleased to see this recognised in the new strategy. We are keen to see how the partnership work already taking place regarding those existing prison and those living in the community will be built upon going forward.

The Commission therefore suggests that the VAWG Strategic Board:

- 13) Sets out how new and existing technologies are currently being or will be harnessed by police, the CPS and CJS agencies locally to identify and pursue perpetrators of VAWG, such as live facial recognition, rapid video response model and electronic monitoring.
- 14) Develops an action plan setting out how victims / survivors will be provided with more frequent, better communication from the police, the CPS and CJS agencies to ensure victims / survivors feel informed and cared for throughout their journey through the justice system and reduce attrition rates.

Overview & Scrutiny

- 15) Provides an update on Hackney's allocation of increased funding from central government for probation and community support services, and sets out how it will be utilised locally to improve partnership working with statutory agencies and the third sector to ensure offenders are closely tracked, supported and managed effectively.