



Minutes of APPG on Domestic Violence

Roundtable Discussion

“Tackling domestic abuse in a digital age”

Monday 27 February 2017

Chair: Jess Phillips MP

The Chair, Jess Phillips MP, welcomed invitees to the private roundtable discussion - which had been convened to consider the APPG on Domestic Violence Recommendations Report on “Tackling Domestic Abuse”. Jess highlighted that the Report had set out recommendations in a range of areas - including the need for effective legislation, how abuse could be effectively prohibited online, including through restraining orders, the response by police and online providers, support for survivors and the need for prevention. Jess welcomed views on how the APPG could take forward the recommendations - and ensure that they would be implemented.

Attendees discussed the following issues:

- Significant gaps between legislation tackling domestic abuse and other forms of violence against girls and women (VAWG) offline and online - and the opportunity that the Law Commission’s review of legislation in this area, and the Government’s new Domestic Violence and Abuse Act, offer for reform. It was highlighted that online abuse must be built into this new legislation if it was to tackle the domestic abuse that survivors were experiencing now.
- The challenges in delivering an effective criminal justice response to online forms of abuse, stalking and other forms of VAWG - and the urgent need to improve training and implementation in this regard. Although national tools and guidance for the police had been developed, participants noted significant issues with effective frontline practice on the ground.
- There was a clear need to improve accountability for progress - it would be important to be able to monitor the effectiveness of response by the police and online providers.
- The evidential difficulties in tackling these forms of online crime effectively. It was highlighted too often the Police did not have the confidence or skills to make applications for evidence under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA). The complex interface between US and UK law, and the challenges posed by sheer volumes of content, were highlighted as additional challenges for evidence collection.
- The need to ‘design out’ opportunities for abuse at the earliest possible stage. The group also noted gaps in understanding how the online gaming world, and the fact that new apps more frequently used by young people, offered opportunities for abuse.

Actions

- The APPG, and relevant attendees, to use the Recommendations Report to push for action on online abuse - and explore opportunities for improved accountability and monitoring in this regard.
- Attendees to develop priorities for tackling gendered online abuse, specifically with regards to the opportunities provided by the Internet Safety Strategy and the new Domestic Violence and Abuse Act.
- Online providers to continue and strengthen partnership working with prosecutors, the police and support services - including in the development and roll out of training, and at the design stage and testing of new products and services.
- The APPG to ensure that tackling online abuse and VAWG were on the agenda of relevant police conferences and meetings on online crime.