



## **Minutes of the APPG on Domestic Violence and Abuse Meeting** **'How the police are tackling violence against women and girls'**

Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2023, 13:00-13:45

Chair: Apsana Begum MP

In the wake of the murder of Sarah Everard, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) recommended a new cross-system approach by the police to end the epidemic of violence against women and girls (VAWG). Since then, despite a new national policing VAWG framework, there has been a sharp increase in the number of police perpetrated VAWG crimes and instances of poor police responses coming to light.

The APPG on Domestic Violence and Abuse met to examine the progress being made within policing to end VAWG, what the VAWG sector is seeing and hearing from survivors, and to what extent this work has led to meaningful action and accountability.

The meeting was chaired by Apsana Begum MP and the other parliamentarians in attendance were Rt Hon Liz Saville Roberts MP, Baroness Uddin, Jess Phillips MP, Rosie Duffield MP, Rebecca Long-Bailey MP and Mark Fletcher MP.

### **Apsana Begum MP**

Apsana welcomed attendees and speakers and noted that Andrea Simon, Director of the End Violence Against Women Coalition, was no longer able to join the meeting as a panellist. Apsana referred to the review by Baroness Casey into the Metropolitan Police which was published on 21<sup>st</sup> March. The Casey Review, commissioned to review the culture and standards of the Metropolitan Police in the wake of the murder of Sarah Everard by a serving police officer, found severe institutional failings across the organisation, including that the Metropolitan Police is failing women and children; that institutional racism, sexism and homophobia exists inside the organisation and in how communities are policed; and that it is unable to police itself. The group noted this review and thanked Baroness Casey for her diligent work on improving policing standards and practices.

### **DCC Maggie Blyth, VAWG lead at the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC)**

Maggie gave an overview of the work being done at a national policing level, including VAWG being made part of the Strategic Policing Requirement (SPR) so it is seen as a serious crime alongside terrorism, and the upcoming Strategic Threat and Risk Assessment (STRA), to be published in April, which will set out the extent of the national threat facing society from a policing perspective. The STRA and work being undertaken

through NPCC this year for the SPR will inform what level of resourcing is needed to address VAWG, and will mean all police forces will be prioritising tackling VAWG.

Maggie acknowledged that there is a considerable amount of work to be done across the justice system to improve responses to VAWG, including improving training and local public protection. There is a joint piece of work being conducted between policing and the CPS to investigate the charge and prosecution of domestic abuse cases and mirroring the work of the national rape action plan and learning of Operation Soteria. Trust in policing among women is at an all-time low, and Maggie is keen to work with the VAWG sector to improve this. To improve performance and trust among the public generally in policing, Maggie highlighted that there needs to be changes to regulations to ensure that police officers found guilty of offences can be removed as swiftly as possible from their posts as leadership within policing do not want anyone working in policing who will further undermine trust.

Concluding her remarks, Maggie noted the publication of the Casey Review into the Metropolitan Police, and that the findings of this report will no doubt resonate across other police forces in England and Wales, and the importance of ensuring the recommendations for the Metropolitan Police are reviewed and reflected across police forces.

### **Apsana Begum MP**

Apsana thanked Maggie for her contribution and noted the considerable work that needs to take place within policing to improve trust and performance.

### **Harriet Wistrich, founder and director, Centre for Women's Justice (CWJ)**

Harriet outlined the work the CWJ do to hold the state to account around delivering justice for women and girls. In March 2020, the CWJ launched a super-complaint on the police's failure to address police perpetrated domestic abuse. In this, they noted that women were fearful of reporting domestic abuse to the police, either out of fear of the colleagues they were reporting or fear that there will be further victimisation and cover ups. Harriet noted significant issues with the misconduct and vetting systems which are resulting in women and girls not being kept safe. CWJ had received lots of examples of this which formed the basis of the super-complaint, and then once this was published, they had an additional 200 women come forward with similar stories.

As part of the super-complaint, CWJ made a number of recommendations to the National Police Chiefs' Council, some of which were accepted, but recommendations like ensuring an external body investigates cases of police perpetrated domestic abuse were rejected. Harriet stressed the need for policing colleagues to ensure that recommendations translate to meaningful change, noting that the Macpherson report which found institutional racism within the Metropolitan Police in 1999 hasn't led to sufficient change, as seen in the Casey Review.

She highlighted the need to explore and examine what creates change and how the VAWG sector and parliamentarians can work to hold police officers and senior leaders within the police to account once the findings of the Casey Review are no longer discussed in the news. She discussed the need for an effective police force – which is everyone’s objective – and the need for the VAWG sector to consider what other reforms or changes are needed to achieve this.

### **Apsana Begum MP**

Apsana thanked Harriet for her contribution and welcomed the final speaker, Nazir Afzal OBE, former chief prosecutor and former adviser to the Welsh Government on VAWG, to deliver his intervention.

### **Nazir Afzal OBE, former chief prosecutor**

Nazir reflected on Harriet’s remarks, and noted the super-complaint from the Tees Valley Inclusion Project and the Halo Project about the police response to victims of sexual abuse from ethnic minority backgrounds who may be at risk of honor-based abuse which is pertinent to the current discussion.

Nazir highlighted institutional misogyny within the London Fire Brigade too, which he recently concluded an investigation into. He found that this isn’t just an issue that is prevalent in London, but is widespread across the country. He expressed the need to focus on outcomes, to look at what good looks like and identify a blueprint for this, and then work backwards to develop a plan to achieve this. Any blueprint should look at global good practice and the work of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Nazir noted the impact of cuts to public services on policing and policing experience – 21,000 police officers with over half a million years of experience between them were lost as a result of austerity measures. There is a culture in policing which doesn’t value work on VAWG, with officers working on VAWG not getting the same respect and resources as other units. Nazir called for police leaders to properly resource work to tackle VAWG, and that spending money on this upfront would save public money in the long run.

Reflecting on what is needed for change, Nazir called for the entire policing structure to be changed, the establishment of an independent mechanism where officers can report concerns safely and vetting to be treated more seriously. He also noted the work happening internationally to use artificial intelligence in assessing risks.

Nazir concluded by paying tribute to the people working in policing that want to make a difference but can’t because of the system they are operating within, calling for more funding to fix the failures in the criminal justice system more broadly and for VAWG to receive a pandemic-level response and level of attention.

## Apsana Begum MP

Apsana thanked Nazir for his contribution and opened the floor for discussion.

## Discussion

- Jess Phillips MP expressed concern that all recommendations can be ignored, and that there is no accountability mechanism to ensure that we are not having the same conversation and talking about the same issue in years to come. Calling for a more fundamental response to VAWG, Jess questioned whether there is a legislative mechanism for this, asked what policing is being done on the ground and noted that MPs have a job to push for this change.
- Responding, Maggie noted the need to improve the criminal justice response to victims, the need to remove the delays to victims accessing support and justice, and the need for more victim support. On what is being done on the ground, the strategic policing requirement will set out what skills and resources are needed in local areas to tackle VAWG. Maggie highlighted the need for clear standards, clear training and more resources to tackle VAWG, all which needs to be provided by the Government.
- Harriet shared the need for police and crime commissioners and metro mayors to play a leadership role in tackling VAWG, to look at implementing the recommendations of the various reviews and holding policing colleagues to account.
- Baroness Uddin expressed her concern at the Home Secretary and Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police denying the finding in the report that the problems identified are institutional in the police force. She expressed her frustration that if the findings of reviews are denied like this, nothing will change. She noted that there may be some issue with relying on artificial intelligence for assessing risk, and that she had recently taken evidence around the flaws of AI and warned that police forces are already misappropriating information.
- Nazir responded that artificial intelligence can never replace a person's judgement, but can support.
- Rosie Duffield MP highlighted that policing is still very much a 'boys club' and shared a sign from Kent Police which implied it was deprioritising domestic abuse and rape by recommending the public report these crimes via an online portal.
- Maggie said that this perception is not what she wants from policing, but noted that it will take a long time to change things.
- Liz Saville Roberts MP questioned that if 14-18% of reported crimes are of domestic abuse, why 14-18% of policing budgets are not dedicated to tackling this. She called for attitudinal change and asked what is needed to address this and how we can move on from legislation into changing perceptions.
- Maggie concluded by reiterating the importance of the Strategic Threat and Risk Assessment in allowing resources to be dedicated to tackling VAWG, which will be published every year and will allow police forces to have a very clear argument for increasing resources towards tackling VAWG.

Apsana concluded the session, thanking all speakers and attendees and noted that details of the next meeting of the APPG will be sent out in due course.