



Dame Meg Hillier MP
House of Commons
London
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Your Reference: MH72822

6 December 2021

Dear Dame Meg,

Thank you for your letter of 29 October to the Secretary of State on behalf of a number of your constituents about Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). I am responding as the Minister responsible for this issue.

As a Government we are committed to tackling all forms of VAWG. VAWG crimes are utterly despicable. They inflict profound and lasting harm on the victims and have a damaging impact on our society as a whole. VAWG has absolutely no place in our society, and we are committed to working with the police and other key partners to confront these crimes wherever they appear.

Since 2010, we have taken significant action to tackle these crimes, including introducing new laws to tackle stalking, forced marriage, female genital mutilation and so-called revenge porn. Importantly, we have brought forward the landmark Domestic Abuse Act 2021, which will provide further protections to the millions of people who experience domestic abuse and strengthen measures to bring perpetrators to justice, as well as transform the support we give to victims ensuring they have the protection they deserve.

In the wake of the tragic Sarah Everard case and the subsequent outpouring of public concern, the Home Secretary urgently commissioned Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) to conduct a thematic inspection into the police's approach to tackling and preventing crimes which disproportionately affect women and girls. The Home Office is grateful to Zoe Billingham for her recommendations, and we took immediate action to support the recommendation for a new National Policing Lead for Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls, a post the Home Office is funding. The Home Office is working closely with the new Lead, DCC Maggie Blyth, who took up her post in October, to address the report's findings and drive forward improvements in policing's response to VAWG.

We also know that public awareness of the impact of VAWG crimes rightly grew in the light of Sarah Everard's murder, and as part of our response the Home Secretary re-opened our Call for Evidence for the new Tackling VAWG Strategy to capture the strength of public feeling on this issue. More than 160,000 responses were received in just two weeks, bringing the total received to over 180,000; an extraordinary figure for a Government consultation.

We published our new Tackling VAWG Strategy on 21 July to help strengthen and go further in our response to tackling these crimes. This can be seen at the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-strategy>.

Our key commitments in the Strategy include:

- The introduction of DCC Maggie Blyth as new full-time National Policing Lead for VAWG to take the lead for this area nationally;
- a communications campaign with a focus on educating young people about healthy relationships and ensuring that victims can access support;
- a £5 million ‘Safety of Women at Night’ fund, in addition to the £25 million Safer Streets Fund and focused on the prevention of violence against women and girls in public spaces at night, including in the night-time economy;
- appointing Laura Shoaf and Anne Shaw as Transport Champion to make public transport safer for women and girls. By January 2022 they will produce independent recommendations on what best practice should be adopted to improve the safety of the transport network for women and girls;
- piloting a tool, StreetSafe, to enable the public to anonymously report areas where they feel unsafe;
- £3 million in funding for what works to tackle violence against women and girls to invest in high quality, evidence-informed prevention projects, including in schools; and;
- an additional £1.5 million this year for specialist “by and for” support services and to increase our funding for helplines, such as the Revenge Porn Helpline.

Your constituents have mentioned the important role of education. Schools and colleges play a vital role in fostering a positive culture in which healthy behaviours are understood and encouraged and harmful attitudes challenged before they escalate. We are already ensuring that Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) is designed so that young people develop an understanding of what healthy and mutually respectful relationships are. Important issues such as personal privacy, consent and challenging stereotypes about gender are part of our guidance to ensure more young people have a better understanding of how to behave towards their peers, including online. Relationships Education has been mandatory in all primary schools and Relationships and Sex Education mandatory in all secondary schools since September 2020.

The Department for Education have also updated statutory guidance - Keeping Children Safe in Education from September 2021 – ensuring that schools and colleges have even clearer guidance on how to deal with reports of sexual violence and sexual harassment, whether they occur inside or outside the school or college gates, or online; and, how to identify and take action to ensure that support is provided.

On 2 September the Home Office, with the support of the National Police Chiefs’ Council, launched our new online tool, StreetSafe, to be piloted across police forces in England and Wales. Aimed primarily at women and girls, the StreetSafe tool enables members of the public to drop a pin onto a map anonymously and to describe factors that caused them concern. The information will be used by the police to deliver improved wellbeing and safety for communities. It can be accessed at: <https://www.police.uk/streetsafe>.

I hope that this reassures you and your constituents of the Government’s commitment. Please extend my gratitude to your constituents for taking the time to write in with their concerns.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rachel Maclean', with a small dot at the end.

Rachel Maclean MP