

End Violence Against Women Coalition – Response to Mayor of London consultation on his draft Police & Crime Plan, March 2013

1. What, if any, other objectives and goals would you add to the Mayor's objectives and goals?

The responses below are from the End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW) which represents more than sixty specialist violence against women organisations.

We are delighted to see that creating 'a safer London for women' is one of the five key objectives of the draft plan. We believe this objective will stand the best chance of being achieved if the plan truly aims to tackle violence against women and girls in all its forms, and if as preventative an approach as possible is taken.

We note also that the London Crime Reduction Board and its Delivery Management Group are critical to the delivery of this Plan. This group does not at present seem to have expertise on violence against women and girls, but might be better able to achieve its objectives if it did.

2. What, if any, other things could be done to address police performance and resource issues?

It is essential that EVERY frontline officer to whom a women or girl could possibly report abuse is trained in how to respond to such reports; this means having basic knowledge of all forms of violence against women and girls and understanding that it is critical that women and girls are believed when they report. We understand such training is ongoing.

Long-term outcomes for women will also be better if the police, courts and generic victim support services work closely with specialist violence against women organisations to ensure women's specific needs are understood.

We note the plan's references to 'gangs' and repeat our call that all programmes tackling serious youth violence should ensure they include specifics on girls' needs and vulnerability to sexual and physical violence related to gangs. Diversionary mentoring schemes for boys should promote positive models of masculinity and respect for women and girls.

3. Do you think confidence in the Metropolitan Police needs to be improved? How do you think that could be done?

The crisis in confidence around the Sapphire Unit needs to be fully recognised. We note that the draft plan includes many clear, specific numerical targets for crime reduction and police performance. We would caution against the use of similar specific targets alone for crimes of violence against women because of the known under-reporting of such crimes (which you acknowledge) and because of known failures to date in the Sapphire Unit for example where a target-driven culture seems to have lead to serious mistreatment of women alleging rape and the failure to ensure justice for them. This has serious, long-term consequences on the confidence of other women to report. It is better to monitor the effectiveness of the MPS by looking qualitatively at victims' experience of the whole process rather than the judicial outcome alone.

Rape Crisis funding and increased third party reporting opportunities will support such work.

4. The Mayor has prioritised keeping police officer numbers high rather than keeping underused buildings open. Do you feel that the focus should be on maintaining police numbers or police buildings? How else could budget savings be made?

Because of the high costs of abuse of women and girls a preventative approach always gives better value for money in the long term.

It is important that agencies beyond the MPS share their responsibility for preventing and intervening and responding to abuse of women and girls. The MPS and MOPAC might make some financial savings if the Mayor encouraged all London boroughs, and critical agencies including health and where possible schools, to support their local Rape Crisis Centres, refuges and specialist BME organisations; to fully engage with the Harmful Practices Taskforce; and to support exiting schemes for women in prostitution.

We note the plans not to cut but to streamline the police force. Good quality supervision of all police officers who are responding to VAWG crimes is essential and we would urge that this is considered when deciding how to restructure management and supervision arrangements.

5. What, if any, other things could be done to prevent crime?

We note the commitment to the Harmful Practices Taskforce and look forward to seeing this multi-agency work begin.

We welcome the plan's multiple references to tackling the demand side of prostitution and increasing exiting opportunities for women. Extending number-plate recognition technology to tackle curb-crawlers, as suggested, should help to address the argument made by some borough police forces that operations targeting women are simply cheaper than going after those who create the demand for prostitution.

We note the proposal in the plan that every school should have a safer schools officer. We urge the MPS and the Mayor to encourage all schools to address all forms of abuse of women and girls by tackling attitudes which condone abuse and making links with specialist women's services. The Mayor's academies could be beacon schools for this approach.

6. What, if any, other things could be done to address justice and resettlement issues?

We note the general targets set out in this section of the draft plan. In relation to crimes of violence against women – only around a third of those convicted of sexual or domestic violence are offered the chance to participate in a perpetrator programme. We urge MOPAC and the Mayor to make specific commitments in this area, and to consult with specialist violence against women organisations when doing so.

We would also urge MOPAC and the Mayor to look at women offenders' specific needs in the criminal justice system. Many women offenders have themselves been victims of serious crime, including sexual and domestic violence and abuse in childhood; many

children suffer when their mothers are imprisoned. Court-ordered community sentences are known to be more effective especially when they are designed with women's specific needs in mind.

7. What, if any, other key crime and safety issues that are important to you would you include?

We find no reference in the plan to sexual harassment, but do remember the Mayor's pledge during the election to work to ensure women felt safer using the transport system for example. A zero tolerance approach to harassment of women in public places in London would create a generally safer and more respectful environment where women and girls are less at risk of more serious crime. It would be a critical part of realising the vision of London as a truly safe city for women.

8. Are there any other issues affecting you that have not been covered in the draft Police and Crime Plan?

Women and girls experiencing different forms of abuse may not feel that the police are available to help and protect them. It is therefore important that the Met, and the Mayor on behalf of London, make themselves visible as taking a stand against all forms of abuse and actively creating a city where it is not tolerated.

We recognise the prominence of and commitment to making London safer for women in this plan. We believe that strong leadership, and making these issues and the fact that London is set on eradicating them visible, are a key part of tackling abuse. As such we would call on police leaders, the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor to make a commitment to speak publicly, frequently, on these issues and to look at other ways of making London visible as a city aiming to be the safest in the world for women.

ENDS