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Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP  
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**Reference: Forthcoming Violence Against Women and Girls and Domestic Abuse Strategies**

Dear Caroline,

Thank you for inviting me to speak to the Committee last month about the forthcoming Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and Domestic Abuse (DA) Strategies, and for your letter of 28 January. I am pleased to write to you to set out in full my responses to the Committee's questions.

As Minister for Safeguarding, tackling violence against women and girls is one of my key priorities. That is why, to inform the development of the new Tackling VAWG strategy, we launched the first ever [Call for Evidence on VAWG](#) of its kind on 10 December. The consultation consisted of four components: a public-facing survey to seek views on the public's attitudes to VAWG; a victim and survivor survey carried out by support organisations to secure valuable insights from those with lived experience of VAWG; written submissions from the VAWG sector and academics, and 16 focus groups to capture views of VAWG Stakeholders including VAWG sector representatives, PCC leads and policing representatives. The CfE closed on 19<sup>th</sup> February and we are in the process of analysing the responses.

*Question 1 - The UK's international obligations require you to adopt and implement 'integrated policies' on all forms of VAWG, including DA. This is partly because victims/survivors often experience multiple forms of VAWG. Could you set out the rationale for having separate strategies?*

*Question 2 - Can you tell us why there was not a formal consultation with stakeholders to inform such a shift in direction for the long-standing approach of a single integrated VAWG strategy?*

*Question 3 - The evidence is clear that all forms of VAWG, including DA, are gendered in that most (not all) victims/survivors are women and girls and most perpetrators are men and boys. Will you commit to continuing to take a gendered*

*approach to the two new strategies, including in policies and implementation at local level? How will violence against men and boys be addressed in the two strategies?*

*Question 4 - The Equality and Human Rights Commission's guidance on [Meeting the Equality Duty in Policy and Decision-Making](#) says that assessing the impact of policy decisions should inform decision-making and start early in the policy development process. It says "Assessing impact on equality should be an integral part of policy development and decision-making" and that documenting is strongly advised. Can you tell us why an impact assessment was not carried out to inform a significant policy decision such as this, which will impact not only those with the protected characteristic of sex, but also race, disability and other characteristics?*

I would like to reassure the Committee that this approach is about us devoting twice as much focus on VAWG and DA. The VAWG strategy will be clear that domestic abuse remains under the umbrella of VAWG, but given that it is such a high harm, high volume crime type, it warrants a dedicated strategy. Domestic homicides account for around one in five homicides and we are concerned that anecdotal evidence suggests that there has been a rise in the number of domestic abuse victims who commit suicide. This illustrates the harmful nature of DA and why it needs to be addressed in its own right. Our intention is to create a dedicated space to focus on DA whilst allowing space for new and emerging forms of VAWG to be considered in the VAWG Strategy. This is not a change in our approach to VAWG, nor does it mean that we consider domestic abuse to be in any way separate from VAWG. The two strategies will be complementary and work together to drive down VAWG crimes and their impact on society. I can also confirm that both Strategies will continue to recognise the gendered nature of these crimes, as does the statutory guidance of the DA Bill. Officials and I have also had meetings with the VAWG sector and responded to many pieces of correspondence reassuring the sector on these points.

In developing the CfE, my officials engaged with the VAWG sector, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, and the Victims' Commissioner and incorporated a range of feedback provided by these partners to inform its development. In addition, we are pleased that the victim and survivor survey component of the CfE is being carried out by expert VAWG support organisations on our behalf, ensuring victims and survivors have access to direct support to those responding.

While we know that these crimes disproportionately affect women and girls, we know that men and boys are also victims of these crimes, To recognise the need of male victims, we published the first ever cross-Government Male Victims' Position Statement in 2019 to clarify and strengthen the response and, as part of the response to the CfE we will look at updating this Statement.

*Question 5 - Can you set out the current governance arrangements for the VAWG strategy;*

- Does the Inter-Ministerial Group still oversee the strategy?*
- Which Cabinet sub-Committee are you accountable to?*

- *What mechanisms are in place to ensure other Government Departments deliver on their actions to support the strategy?*
- *How do you engage with stakeholders?*

*Can you set out how the two strategies will be governed in future, including mechanisms for ensuring action by other Departments?*

*Governance*

As the minister responsible for tackling VAWG, I have oversight of the development and implementation of both the VAWG and DA Strategies. The call for evidence has just closed and we are analysing all of the evidence we have received. I can assure you that the formal governance for the Strategies, which recognises that effective cross-Government working is key to success, will be developed and put in place in due course. This governance will consider how best to engage with the National Policing Board (NPB) and other relevant governance structures across government.

*Question 6 - What mechanisms will you build into the two strategies to ensure that services supporting women from BAME communities, migrant women and disabled women are not negatively impacted by the dual approach, for example by doubling their work and resources in engaging with public services, local authorities and funding bodies?*

To make sure that the VAWG and DA strategies are fully inclusive, we wanted to ensure the CfE is open to the public and includes specific engagement with victims and survivors. We are actively seeking input from minority groups and are holding sixteen focus groups across a broad range of key themes to ensure we hear the perspectives of people, including experts and sector representatives to hear their perspectives, and understand the difficulties experienced by those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, migrants, deaf and disabled and others with protected characteristics. We will remain engaged with these groups through our VAWG stakeholder group meetings and through direct engagement.

To supplement the public survey and ensure we collect data that is robust, Ipsos MORI are also facilitating a nationally representative survey of c.2,000 adults to allow us to consider and report on the views of the public, representative by key demographics such as age, gender, region and ethnicity.

In developing these strategies, we intend for them to work in tandem and complement each other. The National Statement of Expectations will set out clearly how the Strategies should work together for the purposes of commissioning and service delivery.

*Question 7 - How will the strategies better protect women subject to the No Recourse to Public Funds rule which currently leaves them outside protections and support that other women have?*

This Government is committed to doing what it can to support all migrant victims of domestic abuse as victims. We undertook to review the overall response to migrant victims of domestic abuse in response to the recommendations of the Joint Committee on the Draft DA Bill. It is clear from the review is that we need a better evidence base before we can make robust policy decisions about support for this cohort. That is why we have allocated £1.5m toward a new 'Support for Migrant Victims' (SMV) pilot, that will support migrant victims of domestic abuse who do not have access to public funds to access safe accommodation. We have listened to the sector's feedback on the proposed SMV prospectus and I am pleased to say we extended the competition period which has now closed, and we will announce the winner in early March.

*Question 8 - The Prime Minister's announcement on the current lockdown measures included a statement in relation to Domestic Abuse. How is VAWG more widely, for example child sexual abuse and exploitation, embedded into the UK's COVID response at senior levels of government and into Cabinet Committee oversight?*

We know that COVID-19 has had a profound impact on our society, and that it has created significant challenges for frontline services, including as a result of increased the risk of domestic abuse and VAWG within the home. During this unprecedented time, we have had regular and frequent discussions with domestic abuse and VAWG organisations, the Domestic Abuse and Victims' Commissioners, law enforcement and other Government Departments to monitor and assess the impact of COVID-19 on victims of domestic abuse. The Home Secretary too has made VAWG a key focus, supporting the VAWG agenda through her involvement in various forums including the National Policing Board on 6 May 2020, to make this a priority across government.

We are also feeding in as a department to planning around vulnerable children and young people, who may be at additional risk, including of child sexual abuse and exploitation, given reduced opportunities for contact with frontline professionals and trusted adults. In this regard, we are working through the cross-government Vulnerable Children and Young People National Board to ensure join-up with key operational partners across the police, health and social care. In-line with the commitments made at the Hidden Harms Summit in May 2020, we have continued to listen to charities and frontline practitioners working with victims of hidden harms, understanding their needs on the ground and responding with immediate funding to support their continued provision of vital services to victims.

Since the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Home Office has worked closely with law enforcement agencies to monitor and respond to the changing threats and risks to those vulnerable to VAWG. We have encouraged close collaboration between safeguarding partners and wider community stakeholders, to ensure vulnerabilities are being identified and acted upon. Working with other government departments, the Home Office coordinated dissemination of guidance for community partners coming into contact with families (such as supermarkets, postal workers etc) to over 25,000 stakeholders to help them spot the signs of abuse and report concerns to statutory services. This sat alongside briefing developed by The

Children's Society for police officers attending domestic incidents, reminding them to look out for the signs of abuse in any children present.

We have already put in place a range of additional measures, including a communications campaign - #YouAreNotAlone (#YANA) – which provides guidance and information on domestic abuse and has reached almost 25 million UK adults, and has almost 130 million followers on social media.

In addition, to build awareness of the support services available to victims and encourage disclosure of abuse to a trusted adult, the Home Office launched the 'Something's Not Right' campaign targeted at secondary school children in England who suffered a range of harms.

The Home Office has awarded £2m additional in new funding to domestic abuse services affected by the pandemic, on top of the Government's unprecedented £76m support package of emergency funding for the most vulnerable in society, which included over £25m in support for domestic abuse charities. We have further funded £70k to organisations supporting victims of Honour-based abuse, FGM and Stalking and will continue to monitor closely how COVID-19 impacts on victims and seek to adapt our response as necessary.

We also provided additional funding to ensure that children and young people could get the required support. Through the joint Vulnerable Children National Charities Strategic Relief Fund, we distributed £7.6m to provide financial hardship relief for national Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise organisations that support vulnerable children across England and Wales. The Home Office and Department for Education have also made funding available for the NSPCC to expand and promote its national helpline for adults concerned about a child.

*Question 9 - What work is being done to ensure that the standards and rights in the EU Victims Directive are in place at a domestic level for victims so that there isn't a regression in safety, support and protection?*

The principal vehicle for bringing the EU Victims' 2012/29/EU Directive into force in England and Wales was the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime, but it also included primary legislation. The Government transposed the EU Directive in its entirety for all of the UK in November 2015 and whilst the Directive no longer applies now the United Kingdom has departed the European Union, all the rights and entitlements remain.

On 18 November 2020 a new version of the 'Code', replacing the 2015 Code, was published and will come into effect on 1 April 2021. The Ministry of Justice intend to use the future Victims' Law to guarantee these rights, including holding agencies to account for delivering victims' rights through improved reporting, monitoring and transparency – they plan to consult on the Victims' Law later this year.

Question 10 - *The Istanbul Convention, when ratified, will require the UK to allocate resources for the implementation of integrated policies, measures and programmes. How will you ensure compliance with the Convention when there are two strategies?*

Question 11 - *Do you have a provisional date for ratifying the Istanbul Convention?*

Article 7 of the Convention requires us to deliver a coordinated and holistic response to tackling VAWG. It does not require there to be one single strategy covering DA and all other VAWG crimes. The requirement for co-ordinated policies will be met by the links between the two strategies and the other integrated VAWG work across Government.

As set out in the Government's WMS of 22 October 2020, it is the case that the law in each part of the UK needs to be compliant with the provisions of the Convention before the UK as a whole can ratify. There are only 3 elements that remain to be completed; we either meet or exceed the requirement in all other respects. Of those three, the DA Bill will, when passed, extend extraterritorial jurisdiction over certain violent and sexual offences required by Article 44 of the Convention. Additionally, the Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill, which completed its passage through the Northern Ireland Assembly on 18 January and should be implemented in the Autumn, provides for a new domestic abuse offence which would criminalise psychological violence in Northern Ireland, as required by Article 33 of the Convention. Our compliance position on Articles 4(3) (to the extent that it relates to non-discrimination on the grounds of migrant or refugee status) and 59 is under review, pending the results and evaluation of the Support for Migrant Victims scheme. The Government takes its international commitments very seriously and will only commit to ratification when we are absolutely satisfied that we comply with all articles.

I hope that this information assists the Committee in understanding the Government's work in this area and reinforces our commitment to tackling violence against women and girls.

Yours sincerely,



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