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Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP  
Chair, Women and Equalities Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
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Dear Caroline,

I am writing to you as the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee to notify you that the new cross-Government Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy is being published today.

Violence against women and girls is an unacceptable, preventable issue which blights the lives of millions. Crimes such as rape, female genital mutilation, stalking, harassment, and digital crimes such as cyber-flashing, 'revenge porn' and 'upskirting' are taking place every day. We often say these crimes have no place in our society. It would be more accurate to say that they should have no place, because unfortunately they are still all too prevalent. They illustrate appalling, often outdated, attitudes and prejudice towards women and girls that can have a profound impact on victims, their families, and their communities, as well as wider society.

This Government has already made significant strides forward. Since the publication of the first Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls in 2010, we have introduced new offences (including for controlling or coercive behaviour, stalking, 'revenge porn' and 'upskirting'), raised the maximum sentences for stalking and harassment, introduced new orders for stalking, preventing sexual harm and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), introduced a mandatory duty for frontline professionals to report cases of FGM in children to the police, and strengthened the tools available to frontline professionals.

But we must go further. That is why we are today publishing a new cross-Government Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy. A copy of the Strategy (and accompanying Annex) will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses, along with a copy of this letter.

The Strategy builds on progress to date and includes new action to prioritise prevention, support victims, pursue perpetrators, and help make sure the police, education, local authorities, prison and probation service and others work together more effectively.

The Strategy has been informed by the Call for Evidence that the Home Office ran earlier this year to hear directly from the public, which received an unprecedented more than 180,000 responses. The evidence they provided should concern us all and our Strategy is informed by their testimonies.

Further to your letter of 10 June detailing the oral evidence taken at your Committee on the topic of 'Changing cultures underpinning male violence against women', I am pleased to confirm that the Strategy includes a range of actions addressing your concerns under its four pillars:

### **Prioritising prevention**

The Government has already taken action to prevent these crimes, including making Relationship Education compulsory in all primary schools and Relationship and Sex Education mandatory in all secondary schools, we are also investing a further £25 million in the Safer Streets Fund for measures to ensure women and girls feel safe in public spaces. Additional action includes:

- A multi-million-pound **national communications campaign** focused on raising awareness of violence against women and girls and creating behaviour change;
- A **£5 million Safety of Women at Night fund** focused on the prevention of violence against women and girls in public spaces at night; and
- A pilot of an online tool, StreetSafe, which will **enable the public to anonymously report areas where they feel unsafe** and identify what about the location made them feel this way. The data will be used to inform local decision-making.

### **Supporting victims**

The Government is investing more than £300 million this year to support victims. In addition, to make sure that victims know what they can expect from the police, Crown Prosecution Service, courts and other criminal justice organisations, a revised Victims' of Crime Code of Practice (Victims' Code) came into effect in April 2021. The Strategy includes the following further actions to ensure victims of violence against women and girls get the support they deserve:

- The Home Office will provide **£1.5 million funding to further increase provision for 'by and for' services and to further increase funding for valuable specialist services** including the 'revenge porn' helpline;
- The Department for Education will work with the Office for Students to **tackle sexual harassment and abuse in higher education (including universities)** and will **review options to limit use of Non-Disclosure Agreements in cases of sexual harassment in higher education**;
- While there is not at present a specific offence of **street harassment**, there are a number of offences that do capture behaviours raised in our Call for Evidence. **We**

are looking carefully at where there may be gaps in existing law and how a specific offence for public sexual harassment could address those. Yet I am committed to ensuring not only that the laws are there, but that they work in practice and women and girls are confident their concerns will be taken seriously. It is important that the police enforce the law and give women the confidence that if they report an incident, it will be dealt with. That is why our new multimillion-pound national communications campaign will challenge this kind of behaviour, and ensure victims know how and where to report it; and

- NHS England and NHS Improvement are **developing local ‘pathfinder’ projects for enhanced trauma-informed mental health support for sexual abuse victims and survivors** with the most complex needs.

### **Pursuing perpetrators**

This Government wants to see perpetrators of these horrific crimes ruthlessly pursued and to face justice. This Strategy builds on recent work, including the additional £3.2 million from the Home Office to pilot further work to improve rape investigations and prosecutions, a multimillion pound investment in programmes for domestic abuse and stalking perpetrators, and the measures we are introducing through the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill to crack down on serious violent and sex offenders. The Strategy sets out additional actions we will take which include:

- **The Home Office appointing an independent reviewer to review the police management of registered sex offenders in the community**, and new investment for the National Crime Agency to develop new methods of identifying serial sex offenders from existing data;
- The Department for Health and Social Care working to **criminalise ‘virginity testing’**; and
- The Government is **carefully considering the recommendations of the Law Commission’s review of abusive and harmful online communications** which was commissioned by the Department for Digital, Culture Media and Sport and recommends a range of new offences, including a new threatening communications offence and a new offence of cyberflashing.

### **Strengthening the system**

Earlier this year, the Home Secretary commissioned HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) to review policing’s approach to female victims of violence against women and girls. The inspectorate’s report was published recently and found that, while progress has been made, urgent and significant action is needed.

The Government is already introducing new tools and powers, including a new system which will help improve the risk management of dangerous offenders (including registered sex offenders and domestic abuse and stalking perpetrators managed under Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements), and has put in place

a range of multi-agency guidance for education, the police, social care and others. Additional action in the Strategy includes:

- A new and first of its kind **National Policing Lead for Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls** to drive forward the policing approach and action following HMICFRS's inspection;
- The Home Office will **review the disclosure and barring regime** – which helps ensure employers make safer recruitment decisions and that unsuitable people are prevented from working with vulnerable groups, including children;
- The Department for Transport will appoint a **new violence against women and girls transport champion to help ensure women and girls are safe on our public transport**; and
- To make sure that we are continuing to build our knowledge of these crimes, who they happen to, and who commits them, **we will work across Government to improve data** and in turn improve understanding, of these crimes.

As future funding becomes available, we will continue to invest in new programmes to tackle violence against women and girls and build upon the Strategy's commitments.

The Strategy forms part of wider work, including the recent End-to-End Rape Review, the cross-Government Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy, the Ministry of Justice's Concordat on women in or at risk of contact with the Criminal Justice System and the forthcoming Women's Health Strategy. In addition, it will this Autumn be followed by a complementary Domestic Abuse Strategy, a refreshed National Statement of Expectations to support local areas in commissioning services, and a refreshed Male Victims' Position Paper in recognition of the additional challenges which may be faced by men and boys who are victims of these crimes.

Finally, I would like to thank you and your Committee members for your input into this Strategy. I look forward to continuing to engage with you on this important issue.

Yours sincerely,



**Victoria Atkins MP**  
**Minister for Safeguarding**