

(POP0047)

Written evidence submitted by the London Victims' Commissioner (POP0047)

Dear Home Affairs Committee,

1. Firstly, I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to take part in the Home Affairs Committee consultation on policing priorities. Police forces around the country are under huge pressures and failing to carry out basic functions, such as handling calls from the public and understanding the capability and capacity of its workforce. In this sense, it's right to explore the priorities that police forces should focus on.

2. As London's Victims' Commissioner, it's my job to challenge any barriers to justice and support victims in their justice journey, to reach out to them and make sure they are aware of their rights and the services they are entitled to. Part of this involves understanding why victims experience issues when they encounter the justice system. I will therefore focus my consultation response on victim care and how this must be improved.

3. Whilst I recognise that police forces need to strike a balance between preventing and solving crime and carrying out other duties to keep the public safe, they won't be able to do this successfully if they don't have the trust and confidence of the public. Unfortunately, trust and confidence levels in policing have plummeted and it is unsurprising that this is one of the central issues facing the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). This is not only the result of high-profile cases such as those of Sarah Everard, Sabina Nessa, Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman, but also the product of direct personal experiences of victims. In my role, I've personally met with numerous victims who feel failed by the justice system and would not encourage others to come forward and report to the police. Victims often feel distanced from their own case and receive very few updates and limited specialist support throughout the process. These issues are evident in the MPS HMICFRS PEEL inspection, which found that victims were not provided with the right level of advice and support and that officers do not always complete a needs assessment (as stipulated in the Victims Code of Practice) to determine whether victims require additional support. In turn, these issues have a huge impact on victim engagement, for example my 2021 London Rape Review found 65% of cases ending in victim withdrawal. I see too many victims withdraw from the justice process and go on to lodge a formal complaint, which can take months to resolve and often results in an unsatisfactory outcome.

4. High quality victim care is crucial to improving trust and confidence in policing and if police forces are to start prioritising victim needs then they need to radically reform how victim care is being delivered. Therefore, I propose the Victim Care Hub model as a solution to ensuring that victims' rights are always upheld as per the Victims Code of Practice. Throughout my conversations with victims, it is clear that timely and effective communication is fundamental to a victim's confidence in and engagement with the justice system. Unfortunately, justice agencies are failing to deliver victim care, and so in London I am continuing to progress a 'Victim Care Hub' model. This would provide a single point of contact, key updates on case progression, information and advice, answer questions, refer on to specialist support, ensure entitlements under the Victims' Code are being delivered, and monitor this to drive better performance and tackle attrition.

5. The independence of a Hub is crucial in providing victims with the trust and confidence to come forward, seek support and stay engaged throughout the justice process. This is particularly important for certain groups of victims, for example rape victims experience serious trauma which can cause them to feel disempowered and disconnected. This is often misunderstood by justice

agencies and can be exacerbated by inadequate treatment from police, such as lack of updates or having their credibility questioned. Independence is also crucial in supporting migrant victims who can find it difficult to report to the police due to insecure immigration status.

6. The Victim Care Hub model will also provide an important mechanism for victims to have a single point of contact to ask questions, challenge decisions and overcome problems whilst their case is live, thus enabling victims to have their voices heard. I'm confident that this model would improve victim satisfaction and victim attrition rates.

7. Public trust in the MPS is severely dented and as a result, the new MPS Commissioner should look to improve victim care. I have raised these issues with the MPS Commissioner and will continue to do so as I work towards the implementation of a Victim Care Hub model in London.