

Evidence submitted by the Local Government Association [HBA0052]

1. About the Local Government Association (LGA)

- 1.1. The Local Government Association (LGA) is the national voice of local government. We are a politically led, cross-party membership organisation, representing councils from England and Wales.
- 1.2. Our role is to support, promote and improve local government, and raise national awareness of the work of councils. Our ultimate ambition is to support councils to deliver local solutions to national problems.

2. Tackling Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG)

- 3.1 Councils are determined to help tackle Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG), working alongside the police and criminal justice services, Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), health and education services, the voluntary and community sector and wider support services, to help ensure women and girls are protected from all forms of abuse.
- 3.2 We welcome the [Government's Tackling VAWG strategy \(2021 – 2024\)](#) which focuses on tackling all forms of violence against women and girls, including rape and sexual violence, domestic abuse, forced marriage, so-called 'honour-based' abuse, female genital mutilation (and other culturally specific forms of abuse), stalking, sharing of personal intimate images without consent and online harassment, which have devastating consequences.
- 3.3 We support the Government's ambition to drive forward improvements in the effort to target perpetrators; to respond to the changing nature of these crimes; and, to place victims and survivors at the heart of the approach. It is particularly important that future reform captures the lived experience of those affected by VAWG, to help improve the response to these crimes.
- 3.4 There needs to be a wider societal cultural shift towards preventing abusive and violent behaviour, so that it is 'everybody's business' and not simply a criminal justice response. There should also be a focus on community level initiatives and communications campaigns that seek to raise awareness about violence against women and girls and the available support, to ensure those who are seeking help know where to access it. These campaigns should also prompt perpetrators to recognise their own abusive behaviour and seek help to stop it or prevent it escalating.
- 3.5 Ultimately, to tackle violence against women and girls, there must be greater investment in early intervention and prevention schemes that help stop violence from occurring in the first place. Raising awareness in schools is crucial to ensuring that children and young people understand what a healthy relationship is. Youth services are important in supporting this work.
- 3.6 Long-term, sustainable Government funding is needed to help councils and their partners deliver a comprehensive approach to addressing VAWG, which helps to enable planning and the delivery of appropriate and accessible provision. While councils also

have a statutory duty to deliver accommodation-based support and services for domestic abuse victims under the Domestic Abuse Act, the majority of funding for victim support services is routed through police and crime commissioners, who commission and deliver wider victims support services. Long-term funding and sustainable funding for specialist services that can help domestic abuse survivors is vital.

3. So-called Honour-Based Abuse

- 4.1 The Crown Prosecution Service defines “honour” based abuse as “an incident or crime involving violence, threats of violence, intimidation coercion or abuse (including psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional abuse) which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of an individual, family and/ or community for alleged or perceived breaches of the family and/or community’s code of behaviour.”
- 4.2 The Government’s VAWG Strategy highlights that the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) provides the best available estimate of prevalence for a number of VAWG crimes, namely: domestic abuse, stalking, rape, indecent exposure and unwanted touching. However, the Strategy also states that the CSEW does not include information relating to any other forms of violence against women and girls. As such, the understanding of the prevalence of crimes such as ‘revenge porn’, ‘honour’-based abuse, female genital mutilation, and forced marriage is limited.
- 4.3 The Strategy notes there are several data sources which, whilst they cannot be used to measure prevalence, provide additional insights into these crimes. For example, data from the Forced Marriage Unit show that between [January and December 2020](#) the Unit gave advice or support in 759 cases related to possible forced marriage.
- 4.4 Any additional information on the prevalence of so-called honour-based abuse would be useful to help tackle this crime.
- 4.5 The Government’s Strategy outlined that the Home Office would seek out community advocates who can talk to community audiences to explain why these practices are wrong and provide them with resources to back up the messages. We are supportive of this approach. In addition to this, the Home Office’s “Enough” campaign could also look to focus on honour-based abuse as part of its national campaign work to address perpetrator behaviour and raise awareness of different forms of gender-based violence and abuse. It is important for any information and training materials to use language that victims and survivors will identify with when describing abusive behaviours.
- 4.6 Councils have safeguarding responsibilities for children and vulnerable adults who may be at risk of abuse or neglect. Practitioners such as police officers, social workers, teachers and those working in housing services are often the first to respond to victims, therefore it is vital that all partners are equipped to recognise signs of so-called honour-based abuse and respond appropriately.
- 4.7 As part of their safeguarding work, many councils include information about so-called honour-based abuse on their website and signpost to specialist support services and the [national Honour-Based Abuse Helpline](#), which offers support for both victims and statutory and voluntary sector professionals.
- 4.8 The Department for Education has launched an ambitious programme of children’s social care reform. It would be helpful as part of this to look at how practitioners across all local partners are trained to spot and tackle so-called honour-based abuse, for

example through proposed changes to children's social worker training and child protection.

- 4.9 Safe Lives found a quarter (26 per cent) of honour-based violence (HBV) victims in the Insights dataset required an interpreter. For people experiencing HBV, language barriers can make the process of seeking support more complicated and there are additional barriers around locating and contacting services, and the need to communicate with professionals through a translator. We, therefore, support the Safe Lives' recommendation for the Government to provide additional funding to increase the number of specialist translators for the purpose of advocacy, to be used by domestic abuse services.
- 4.10 The Government also committed to invest in improving understanding of 'What Works' to prevent VAWG crimes overall. It would be helpful to continue to build the evidence-base to identify how best to prevent the range of VAWG crimes, including honour-based abuse, and disrupt perpetrators. There is still not enough evidence on what works to prevent offending, including knowledge on the causes, drivers, and risk factors associated with perpetrators' behaviour.
- 4.11 The forthcoming Draft Victims Bill and the Government's Victims Funding Strategy could be a prime opportunity to identify how victims of so-called honour-based abuse can be better supported. We are supportive of the Government's ambition to improve coordination of funding across government for all victim support services and ensure the needs of victims are at the very heart of the criminal justice system. With regards to commissioning, it is also vital that there is greater national investment in community-based support, including early intervention and prevention services, to ensure every person who needs support can access it.

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