

Minutes of the APPG on Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse, open meeting to discuss the forthcoming VAWG Strategy: 12 May 2025 11:15

VAWG Strategy development update from the Home Office: Danai Pagoni, VAWG Strategy Lead

Danai Pagoni introduced the draft VAWG strategy that is due to be published this summer. The strategy will comprise four “pillars”:

1. Prevention; preventing people from perpetrating and experiencing VAWG by targeting its underlying drivers and risk factors.
2. Intervening early: early intervention to identify and address harmful behaviours, by equipping frontline services and agencies to be able to take action as soon as possible once VAWG has been identified.
3. Response: transforming the response to violence against women and girls by overhauling the policing criminal and family justice systems, as well as the community response to perpetrators, so that we are identifying, managing and punishing where appropriate.
4. Strengthening support: to protect victims and survivors from harm, enable them to recover and move forward after violence and abuse.

The four cross cutting principles of the strategy will be:

1. Holding perpetrators to account – responsibility for perpetration
2. Respecting survivor and victim voices – respecting the needs wishes and safety of both adult and child survivors
3. Embedding a multi-agency approach
4. Considering intersectionality and disrupting discrimination.

The scope of the strategy considers VAWG as not exclusively but primarily committed by men, also considers other forms of abuse, such as Honour Based Abuse, Child Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse (CAPVA), child sexual abuse and tech abuse. Men and boys are recognised as victims; the strategy considers male victims throughout.

Q&A

A question was asked about the timeline for the strategy, and what has government done around engagement with survivors and organisations.

- There has been extensive sector engagement through the VAWG sector advisory board, with 20 members plus rotating seats for by and for and front-line service organisations

- There have also been a series of roundtables on specific themes including by and for and specialist organisations
- Regular meetings have taken place with 50-70 sector members, also speaking with the DAC office on ways that Home Office can speak to survivors

A question was asked around child sexual abuse in the strategy, in terms of whether a separate consultation will take place, and will that timeline align with the work on VAWG

- Child sexual abuse is being held by another team, which may not exactly align, but that the sector will be kept informed

A question was asked about activities proposed under individual pillars – keen to see stalking represented as part of the perpetrator elements.

- Reassurance was given that stalking will be reflected in the strategy.

Delivery of the VAWG strategy, messages from the sector

Janaya Walker, Head of Public Affairs, End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW)

Janaya set out EVAW's role in encouraging government to commit to a VAWG strategy and welcomed the government's drive to halve VAWG in a decade.

The VAWG strategy needs to include prevention and take a whole school's approach. It will also need to look at online regulation. VAWG has risen on the political agenda, with investment in funding in perpetrator work and a strategy. However, responses tend to follow a moment of crisis – we need to see a more strategic, long-term approach rather than reactive.

The last VAWG strategy had prevention as a pillar but again there was more focus on a crisis response. Janaya also referred to the recent NAO report into the previous VAWG strategy which affirmed that prevention did not receive the level of ambition that EVAW had hoped to see – and is hopeful for a different approach with this strategy.

On rape and sexual assault – the former government's rape review focused on addressing the decline in prosecutions and convictions for rape. We need to understand what measures could prevent and reduce rape and sexual violence and stop it from happening in the first place, this question has been absent so far in policy making.

EVAW's decriminalisation of rape report in 2021 included recommendations for more research on what survivors want, what justice looks like for survivors, developing an understanding of what prevents rape. The report also asks that this is looked at in a holistic way, from schools to the then DCMS at the time, to public health work.

The prevention element needs to be more long term rather than an afterthought. And this is where we are hoping to see the shift today.

Janaya also referred to the recent Youth Endowment Fund report on young people, which published a series of recommendations. On preventing children's involvement in violence, it

stated that prevention activities, including the kind of lessons and training for staff, can reduce violence by an average of 17%. There is clearly more to do in schools and in understating how supported and able teachers feel to deliver this work.

EVAW leads a prevention network of frontline specialists who are doing that work in schools. When thinking about perpetrators and those who cause harm in education settings important questions are raised around what resources and interventions are available.

We need to see is a shift upstream and to think about what is effective at the earlier stages, particularly considering what interventions are appropriate at which stage, how do we get the balance right between safeguarding, welfare and the punitive responses?

Finally, the government's decision to commission the Sentencing Review is also reaffirming some of these questions around how to do things differently, because the current approach is quite unsustainable and unjust to survivors.

Jo Todd CBE, Chief Executive, Respect

Jo started by highlighting that historically, government's VAWG strategies did not mention perpetrators at all, however the last Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan did include a discrete pillar with a dedicated funding stream.

This draft strategy has perpetration including throughout and is described as cross-departmental, which is a positive move forward and shows how far we have come. It is also good to see a focus on prevention, but we do not yet have buy in from across government.

In terms of some of the challenges – these are messages that have already been delivered to government by Respect – there is concern that there is an over-reliance on Ministers Phillips and Davies-Jones, we hope to see this change and more of the other ministers involved – otherwise there is a risk we will end up with a criminal justice strategy. In order for this strategy to be successful, we need to see a clear implementation plan and holding to account.

There is also a need for Treasury buy in – to ensure the step-change with funding is going direct to agencies. We know the Home Office is working on this, but we have an ambitious aim without the funding behind it.

Men as victims continue to be an issue, it is confusing for male violence organisations who feel that male victims are an add-on. This also presents a problem for the framing, as VAWG is about inequality between men and women. We need to discuss whether we need a different approach – recognise that giving men their own strategy may not be the answer.

On commissioning – need to get it right to ensure money reaches the right organisations. We hear that smaller orgs where survivors need to go to receive support and where perpetrators go to address their behaviour are losing out on commissioned work.

On halving VAWG in a decade – ending it is intangible, so a target is welcome, but it cannot be a simple metric. We need to look at how we halve VAWG across intersecting metrics. We need to ask the question - is halving VAWG about halving the experience of VAWG by adults and children or the perpetration? Ministers has said it is the former – which is a smaller number than the perpetration. The data on perpetrators is poor, we need to be collecting and analysing to understand who is perpetrating, then using the data to identify how we stop them.

Investment in high harm (DAPO) as part of Drive Partnership – if agencies are focusing on those that cause the most visible harm, they will miss early identification and prevention. Need clarity on the aim and a narrative around it.

There is a risk that more complex cases are de-prioritised and certain demographics will be focused on – this cannot be a quick win, all perpetrators must be held to account.

Young people causing harm, has come to front of mind with the drama Adolescence. What the drama has revealed is that not enough is being done with young people causing harm. Therefore, early intervention is important, as this is happening in young people's first relationships.

On family courts, highlighted – perpetrators going through the family courts still do not have a pathway to programmes, this is frustrating and unsafe. This needs to be addressed in the strategy.

Discussion

Jess Asato MP commented that we need to be brave and get it right rather than do things too quickly and miss the target. What we do not want is to end up with is a meaningless product at the end of the process.

Emily Darlington MP commented that if we can increase confidence in a police response, this will increase confidence in the system. On prevention – in Milton Keynes, a self-designed pilot project was delivered in schools and was oversubscribed. The school's element to this is crucial, early intervention is key. If we can stop the cycle and do the longitudinal work that is needed, there is an opportunity for a significant impact.

Ms Darlington sits on the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee Inquiry into Algorithms and the Online Safety Act and commented that whilst the work of the inquiry is aimed at misinformation, what was clear hearing from Ofcom is that there is low understanding of the impact of abuse beyond the big platforms. This element of the strategy needs to be stronger.

Jess Asato MP also talked about the need for cross cutting approach, recognising that this is a public health issue, that goes beyond the crimes committed. We need a better sense of how this will be addressed in the VAWG strategy. Struck that we do not have an equivalent VAWG Mission Task Force unit in the Cabinet Office for Safer Streets in the same way that the Child Poverty Unit exists for that mission.

Responding to comments, Danaï Pagoni commented that education and online harm are both important and will be part of the strategy, working on broader targeted interventions – engagement with DfE Ministers has been greater than in the previous strategy, and the DfE will be invited to the next VAWG Advisory Board. Media literacy and online is being reviewed across departments, prioritising with Department for Skills Innovation and Technology, including AI and device controls. Home Office is also looking at early intervention including young people who cause harm.

When reporting, the VAWG strategy will state that we expect to see numbers going up before they go down, ministers are aware of this.

Evaluations will be available for specific policies, will review what the reporting framework will look like for evaluations, with an understand that having one metric is not best approach.

On cross government engagement – part of the Safer Streets mission – an internal process is in place where the different departments, to feed into the Safer Streets board.

Janaya Walker responding to Emily Darlington MP's points about online safety – the guidance in the Online Safety Act is still non-statutory which is a challenge.

Good that we are all in agreement on importance of schools – the loophole is around mandatory Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) – for 16–18-year-olds this is voluntary, so a key age group is not guaranteed the same level of learning opportunity in the Children, Schools and Wellbeing Bill which is currently going through Parliament.

Also reiterated the importance of funding – a letter has been written to Home Secretary and the Chancellor from the sector to set this out.

Welcomed the intersectionality element of the strategy, this has been an ongoing challenge for disabled and black and minoritised survivors.

Q&A

A question was asked on whether rurality be included – it was not included in the previous strategy

- The strategy will reflect the rural element – as part of the intersectional considerations of several types of services. The Spending Review will be challenging – but the intention is that all types of victims will be considered.

A question was asked whether experts in the space will be able to see the strategy pre-publication.

- The VAWG Advisory Board will have sight, Home Office would not normally share more widely, but those who do will represent the views of a wide range of organisations. Jo Todd offered to take any points from the perpetrator sector back to the Advisory Board from perpetrator providers.