

Office of the Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales

Statement of Katie Kempen in Response to 'Request for Evidence under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006, Reference for Request M2/OVCEW/01 on behalf of the Office of the Victims' Commissioner'

This statement (consisting of 27 pages) is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signed..

Personal Data

Dated **11/5/2023**

1. I make this statement on behalf of the Office of the Victims' Commissioner (OVC) as the most senior Civil Servant currently working in the OVC.
2. I have been employed as a Civil Servant for the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) since 21 June 2021. I joined the OVC as Chief Executive on 21 June 2021.

The Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales

3. The Victims' Commissioner (VC) for England and Wales was established in the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 (the **Act**). The general functions of the Victims' Commissioner are that they must:
 - i. Promote the interests of victims and witnesses;
 - ii. Take such steps as he considers appropriate with a view to encouraging good practice in the treatment of victims and witnesses; and
 - iii. Keep under review the operation of the Code of Practice (commonly known as the Victims' Code).
4. The VC has further powers including being able to consult any persons they think appropriate and to make reports. The VC must publish an annual report on the carrying out of the functions of the VC that year and provide advice to ministers when required.
5. The VC cannot act for any particular victim or witness, bring or conduct particular proceedings or act in a judicial capacity.
6. The VC may make recommendations to authorities within their remit. There are a number of authorities within the VC's remit, listed in Schedule 9 of the Act, including The Department of Health and Social Care, The Ministry of Justice, The Home Office, The Crown Prosecution Service, The Criminal Cases Review Commission and The Prison Service.

The Office of the Victims' Commissioner

7. The VC has staff who assist them to deliver their role and functions in the form of the OVC. This comprises civil servants employed by the MoJ. When a VC is in place, staff work to the VC, comparable to how civil servants work to a minister.

8. Dame Vera Baird KC was appointed as VC in June 2019; she left the role at the end of September 2022. A further appointment is not expected until (at earliest) spring 2023. As such, at the time of writing this response (January 2023), no VC is in post. The VC represents a 'legally separate' entity to the MoJ. In contrast OVC staff remain civil servants within the MoJ and are not part of, or employed by, a separate legal entity.
9. My role within OVC is to: (i) lead the office to help the VC fulfil their statutory duties; (ii) support the VC in engaging with stakeholders; (iii) manage the team's budget; (iv) provide advice; and (v) help design the VC's priorities and plans. As I joined in June 2021, I was not present during much of the period to which the Inquiry's request relates. In addition, there has been significant staff turnover within the OVC during this period. The OVC currently only has five of its typical workforce of ten staff, of whom the longest serving is the Diary Manager, who was in post throughout the pandemic but occupies a junior role, the Policy Manager (in post from September 2020) and the Communications Manager (in post from November 2020).
10. As a result of this turnover, and the departure of the VC herself, there is very little organisational knowledge or recollection of key decision making during the pandemic. As a result, and in the absence of a VC to provide a more comprehensive response, I am responding in my role on behalf of the OVC. This response will, for a number of reasons, focus on a factual overview of the information available from extant records. This is because these matters are outside of my own knowledge, because I am not the VC and so am not familiar with or party to the underlying intent or decision making which informs policy-setting, and because I am bound by the Civil Service Code.

Key office holders

11. As outlined above the OVC is a small team and has faced significant turnover of personnel. The following people held office within the team across the specified period (January 2020 to May 2022):
 - i. Dame Vera Baird KC – Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales
 - ii. Russell A'Court – Chief Executive of the OVC until June 2021
 - iii. Katie Kempen – Chief Executive of the OVC from June 2021
 - iv. Dr. Elaine Wedlock – Head of Reviews and Analysis until April 2020
 - v. Dr. Sarah Poppleton – Head of Reviews and Analysis from April 2020 until April 2022
 - vi. Dr. Julian Molina – Senior Research Officer until May 2021
 - vii. Dr. Madeleine Storry – Senior Research Officer from July 2021
 - viii. Laura O'Hara – Communications Manager until August 2020
 - ix. Thomas Cracknell – Communications Manager from November 2020

- x. Anna McCreddie – Head of Policy and Stakeholders – August 2019 until June 2020
- xi. Beccy Shortt, VAWG and Domestic Abuse Policy Manager from September 2020
- xii. Hester Waterfield, Stakeholder Engagement Manager from September 2020
- xiii. Natasha Pizzuto – Diary Manager
- xiv. Joss Mistry – Correspondence Manager

Response to request

12. This response to the Rule 9 request pulls together key work under thematic headings. It is complemented by the exhibited spreadsheet (Exhibit OVC/1 – INQ000108583) and chronology (Exhibit OVC/8 – INQ000108590) providing an 'information overview' which collates relevant content from OVC news items from the VC's website, tweets, the VC diary and letters with ministers and senior civil servants.
13. A Glossary of terms and acronyms used is also exhibited as OVC/9 (INQ000108591).
14. In order to provide information in a structure that is useful to the Inquiry, the submission is broken into relevant sections. This begins with an overview of governance and engagement arrangements before overviews of issues raised and responses to them under key topic headings.
15. The OVC implemented a thorough methodology when searching for and identifying documents in order to compile this response. The OVC regularly publishes news items on its key work and in response to statements from the Government. The OVC also regularly publishes letters between the Office and ministers. OVC staff therefore searched the OVC's archived and current news items, issued media statements, tweets and web publications to inform this statement.
16. The OVC's Diary Manager, who worked in the OVC across the specified period, conducted a broad range of searches to access documents to inform this statement. In order to provide an overview of the VC's key meetings for the specified period, she conducted a search of the VC's shared Outlook calendar (the **VC Calendar**), the OVC's shared drive and shared email inbox, as well as her own email inbox.
17. The VC Calendar is a shared calendar which everyone in the OVC has access to in order to provide a central record of VC meetings. In addition to the VC Calendar, OVC staff have their own personal Outlook accounts, including email boxes and calendars. The VC also had a personal Outlook account, but, OVC staff did not have access to this. As the VC Calendar was used as a record keeping tool within the OVC, the VC Calendar was associated with a generic email address (victims.commissioner@victimscommissioner.org.uk) which is open to email by both members of the public and stakeholders.

18. The OVC's Diary Manager focused her search on the VC Calendar, as this is where the VC's meetings were recorded, including relevant meeting papers and emails. She conducted a keyword search for 'COVID' as an initial search which returned regular meetings with COVID-19 in the title. The use of "COVID" as a key word returned a huge number of results and it would have been disproportionate for the Diary Manager to consider every returned search result. In order to complete a more thorough search, the Diary Manager completed a day-by-day search of the VC Calendar, examining the entries for each day over the period in question for their relevance to COVID-19, plus then reviewing the associated emails, locating relevant paperwork, and seeking to identify additional pertinent meetings and actions.
19. The OVC's Diary Manager followed the same process to check the OVC shared drive, OVC email inbox and her own email inbox for any relevant information that was not saved on the VC Calendar.
20. The current Head of Policy and Research is well-versed in the current and former research completed by the OVC and has also assisted in the preparation of this statement, as I have spoken with her in relation to whether the OVC carried out any specific research on COVID-19. The current Head of Policy and Research confirmed to me that the OVC did not carry out any specific research in relation to COVID-19.
21. It was common practice for the VC to attend meetings without OVC staff attending alongside. Where the VC did attend meetings with staff support, this tended to be with the Chief Executive. I have conducted key word searches for 'COVID' in my inbox, calendar and private files in respect of my own period as Chief Executive.
22. There are no physical files or documents relating to the period in question as OVC staff were working from home throughout the pandemic and so physical documents were not generated. In any event, the OVC does not tend to work with or communicate by way of hard copy documents and keeps files electronically instead.
23. The OVC made enquiries with the MoJ in relation to accessing the former Chief Executive's files and emails. We understand that these accounts have been disabled by the MoJ in line with the MoJ's policy and are subject to strict data protection controls. To date, the OVC has not been granted access to these documents by the MoJ. Should the Inquiry Team require that the OVC secure access to and search these folders, we will make further enquiries as to any additional legal authority the MoJ may require to furnish access. In any event, as this statement has been based on the team calendar, news archive and letters to ministers, access to these folders is, in my belief, unlikely to significantly alter or expand this statement.
24. The VC left office on 30 September 2022. The OVC is responding to this inquiry without the contribution of the former VC, who has declined to provide a statement, and, as such,

has not searched her inbox or private folders. Furthermore, any informal communication, where notes were not saved on the team diary, will not be maintained by the OVC.

25. The VC is a legally separate entity from the MoJ and a public appointee. The OVC staff are civil servants employed by the MoJ. The VC did not grant the OVC team access to her inbox or private files during her time as VC and the OVC staff used the VC calendar to plan for her meetings. As such, staff cannot access her files or emails as these were exclusive to the VC.
26. It is, in any event, not appropriate for OVC staff to search the private files and emails of the VC, as the OVC team are civil servants, required to comply with the Civil Service Code. Furthermore, during discussions with the Inquiry Team, the OVC have been clear that we have responded as an office without input from the former VC. The OVC cannot provide commentary in relation to any private files or emails from the VC, particularly where these stray into matters of policy. This would make it further inappropriate for the VC's private files and emails to be searched. The OVC has requested that these files are retained by the MoJ, who provide IT services to the OVC. If the Inquiry requests a statement from the former VC or the next VC, once in post, the OVC will be happy to support any enquiries with the MoJ to secure access to support his/her statement.
27. Following conversations with the Inquiry Team, this response does not exhibit all minutes and other documents. However, the appended spreadsheet contains details of the documents held by the OVC, which are available upon request.

Briefings

28. The OVC cannot locate briefings or guidance prepared on the public health and coronavirus legislation and regulations that were proposed and enacted, nor any requests for these documents. This includes for the Prime Minister, Office of the Prime Minister, the First Minister, Cabinet and Cabinet Committees. Where the VC has written to ministers, taken part in the Hidden Harms Summit and / or provided a view through select committees, they are highlighted in the remainder of this statement and in the exhibited spreadsheet (Exhibit OVC/1 – INQ000108583).

Governance and meetings

29. Based on our analysis of available diary records, the VC attended a range of meetings across the period. This section highlights key meetings and governance arrangements. It is complemented by the diary section of the attached spreadsheet (Exhibit OVC/1 – INQ000108583).

Cabinet Office and Cabinet Office COVID19 Committees

30. There are no records of any such meetings in the VC diary.

Regular meetings

31. Regular meetings from the VC's diary are included within this section. There are no diary entries for regular meetings with SAGE, the Technical Advisory Group (**TAG**), the Disability Unit, Race Disparity Unit, Social Mobility Commission and Government Equalities Office in the Cabinet Office and the Forced Marriage Unit in the Home Office, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic COVID-19 Socio-economic Subgroup.

32. The VC's diary included a meeting with the Interpersonal Abuse Unit called the Home Office Violence Against Women and Girls (**VAWG**) Stakeholder meeting. The first meeting, due to take place on 27 March 2020, was postponed and the next meeting appears in the diary on 22 October 2020. However, the agenda for this meeting does not include COVID-19, but rather focusses on the VAWG strategy. Later agendas do not focus on COVID, but instead look at the VAWG Strategy, domestic abuse work and other similar areas. The meeting was then held every other month until October 2021 and then quarterly. It remains active. Papers for the meetings are available on request.

VC led meetings – Victims' Commissioner Advisory Group

33. The VC leads the Victims' Commissioner's Advisory Group (**VCAG**), comprising key stakeholders such as academics, representatives from the victims' sector and from across the criminal justice system. VCAG meets quarterly and met throughout the period outlined. The group discussed supporting victims through COVID-19 and beyond as agenda items on 20/04/2020 and 13/07/2020. Minutes and papers are available for these on request.

VC led meetings – meeting with PCC representatives

34. The VC started a regular call with Police and Crime Commissioner (**PCC**) representatives from 30 March 2020. PCCs commission support services for victims. The call initially met weekly to discuss the impact on COVID on the frontline services before moving to fortnightly from August 2020. The group has continued to meet and now has a monthly meeting to maintain engagement between the OVC and PCCs' representatives. Notes from the first meeting are exhibited as OVC/4 (INQ000108586).

35. The meetings sought to cover:

- i. Emerging trends of the impact of COVID-19 on demand for victim services,
- ii. Discernible crime trends associated with the outbreak,
- iii. Availability of resource and staffing, and
- iv. Any areas where the VC's intervention with MoJ on behalf of the victims' sector would be useful in terms of either additional resources or public messaging.

36. The calls fed into the work undertaken by the MoJ Victims and Witnesses Policy Team. In particular, their weekly calls with frontline service providers were fed into the Silver Command looking at the impacts of COVID-19 across the whole criminal justice system. The VC was a member of this call. Notes and papers from the meetings shared with Silver Command are available on request.

VC led meetings – meeting with representatives of the Sexual Violence and Abuse Sector

37. The VC established a regular engagement meeting with representatives of the Sexual Violence and Abuse Sector in July 2020. This group met every fortnight to discuss key issues for the sector. This included funding and helplines. Papers are available on request.

MoJ led meeting – COVID19 Victim and Witness Silver Command Group Terms of Reference

38. The MoJ established a Group, Chaired by Catherine Hinwood, a Senior Civil Servant. The Terms of Reference (Exhibit OVC/2 – INQ000108584) states that its purpose is:

- i. *“The Covid 19 Victim and Witness Group (VWG) Silver Command will advise and assist the MoJ (MoJ) in its aim to support victims and witnesses of crime in response to Covid 19, providing strategic direction, guidance and oversight.*
- ii. *The Group will be responsible for identifying developing risks and issues that may have an impact on victim and witness strategy, policy or operational effectiveness; and for resolving or escalating those issues to the Covid 19 Criminal Justice System (CJS) Gold Command Group where appropriate.*
- iii. *In order to achieve this, the VWG will:*
 - i. *Ensure victims and witnesses have access to support during this time, including contingency and scenario planning;*
 - ii. *Monitor, raise, resolve, and escalate to the CJS Gold Command Group where appropriate, issues relating to service provision for victims and witnesses; and*
 - iii. *Ensure timely and effective communications on issues relevant to victims and witnesses between key partners and the Ministry of Justice.”*

39. The VC fed issues raised at her meeting with PCCs to this group.

40. This Group first met on 19 March 2020; the VC was first invited to attend on 25 March 2020. These meetings took place weekly for the first few months of the pandemic, moving to fortnightly from August 2020.

41. The group discussed key issues including key worker status for victim support services, funding, capacity of support services, communication campaigns and issues and risks for victims. Papers and notes are available on request.

VAWG Sector Call

42. Women's Aid organised the VAWG Sector Call responding to COVID-19. The VC first attended this meeting on 24 March 2020.
43. The purpose of this call, noted on the minutes from the 24 March 2020 meeting, was to *"lift up from operational groups and working groups, take a strategic view across what's happening across sector and how we are responding."*
44. The group considered key issues such as accommodation for victims of domestic abuse, policing and the funding of services.
45. This meeting was held weekly from March 2020 to August 2020 and then fortnightly throughout the period. Various papers and notes are available on request.

Criminal Justice Board

46. The VC is a member of the MoJ run Criminal Justice Board (**CJB**). The CJB met in March, May, July and December 2020 and in July 2021.
47. The CJB discussed the criminal justice response in its March 2020 meeting. This meeting was attended by the OVC Chief Executive at the time, Russell A'Court, and agreed to establish a Gold Command Structure to support cross system working.
48. The VC attended the remaining meetings. The response to COVID-19 was considered in these meetings. The VC highlighted the importance of including victims' representatives in all decision-making forums in the May 2020 meeting.
49. The CJB had several subgroups including case progression, sexual offences, forensics and disclosure. Papers from the various meetings are available on request.

Courts

50. The VC met with Susan Acland-Hood, the Chief Executive of HM Courts and Tribunal Service (**HMCTS**), on 1 April 2020 as part of a regular catch up. A briefing, created by the then Chief Executive to prepare the VC for this meeting, is available on request.
51. The VC's diary first includes an invitation to the COVID-19 'Magistrate court – victim and witness issues' meeting on 29 April 2020. This appears to be the first meeting of the group which aims *"to look at what can/needs to be done to facilitate and support witness engagement and attendance, and zero in on domestic abuse cases."* The meeting was chaired by Catherine Hinwood, a senior civil servant in the MoJ. Various notes and papers are available on request.
52. The meeting took place again on 4 May 2020 and 6 May 2020 before being renamed the 'Court Victims and Witness task and finish group' which met again in May and June 2020 and the last meeting of this group in the VC's diary was in August 2020.

53. On 12 May 2020, the VC wrote to Susan Acland Hood, Chief Executive of HMCTS, to outline her role, the impact of trials on victims and the importance of victim representation. The VC asks why she has not yet been invited to join the Jury Trials Working Group. Susan Acland-Hood responded on 21 May 2020 to invite the VC to discuss this further with the chair of the group.
54. The VC joined the 'Jury Trials Restart Working Group' on 25 June 2020. The group was run by HMCTS and looked at restarting jury trials, the court backlog and court issues. There were further meetings in the VC's diary in July 2020. Various notes and papers are available on request.
55. The VC was invited to the 'Extending Criminal Court Operating Hours Working Group', run by HMCTS, on 3 July 2020. There were further meetings in the VC's diary in July 2020. Various notes and papers are available on request.
56. There was an additional subgroup, the Backlog Data Gathering Group, from July to August 2020. This then became the Victim and Witness Sub-Group from August to October 2020. Various notes and papers are available on request.
57. The VC was updated on the establishment and roll out of Nightingale courts through letters from Susan Acland-Hood on 19 July 2020 (opening courts) and Kevin Sadler on 16 February 2021 (rollout).
58. The VC was updated, as a member of the Criminal Justice Board, on the courts' plan for recovery, by Kevin Sadler on 7 September 2020.
59. The VC raised pertinent issues regarding victims including:
- i. a letter to Robert Buckland, Secretary of State for Justice, on 17 July 2020, outlining concerns that victims' access to special measures (measures that adapt the way evidence is given in criminal trials and are designed to help victims and witnesses give the best quality evidence they can) are being hampered by social distancing requirements.
 - ii. a letter to Kevin Sadler, the then Chief Executive of HMCTS concerning lack of special measures (screens) available at a Carlisle Court on 30 November 2021. Kevin Sadler replied to this on 13 December 2021 explaining plans to rectify the issue.
60. The Government produced data on criminal court statistics before, during and after the pandemic. This data is published online quarterly and includes data on outstanding case volumes, timeliness and age of outstanding cases amongst other data.

Parliamentary committees

61. The VC was regularly asked to attend parliamentary committees as part of her role. There were records that she raised issues relating to COVID-19 at the following committees

during this time period. Select committees routinely publish transcripts of these appearances via the Parliament.uk website:

- i. Oral evidence at the Home Affairs Select Committee, 15 April 2020 on preparedness for COVID-19. The VC called for pharmacy or supermarket code word scheme for victims to access help, raised concerns around charity funds of £750m, where she raised fears smaller charities would lose out. The VC also called for ring-fenced funding for domestic abuse charities and raised Counting Dead Women (statistics compiled by Dr Karen Ingala Smith) figures on numbers killed in early lockdown.
- ii. Oral evidence at the Justice Committee, 28 April 2020, on the work of the VC. The VC flagged governance arrangements that enabled her to speak to PCC officers during this period, an uptick in anti-social behaviour, an increase in fraud and domestic abuse as well as courts and risks to children.
- iii. The VC gave evidence to the Domestic Abuse Public Bill Committee on 4 June 2020 where she mentioned COVID-19 in relation to her work. For example, she again highlighted that she regularly spoke to PCCs and that there had been increased demands of services during the pandemic.
- iv. Oral evidence at the Justice Committee, 2 March 2021, where the VC commented on court capacity and the impact on victims.
- v. Oral evidence at the Justice Committee, on 22 February 2022, considering fraud and the impact on victims. The VC briefly mentioned the growth of fraud during COVID-19.

Ministerial meetings

62. The VC regularly attended meetings with ministers as part of her work. These included meetings with the Attorney General and the Secretary of State for Justice. The following meetings are of note for the Inquiry:

- i. 22 April 2020 – the VC held an introductory meeting with the Attorney General where they had general discussions in relation to COVID-19, working from home, COVID-19 and domestic abuse and the impact of delay in the courts (Exhibit OVC/11 – INQ000182695).
- ii. The VC met with the Victims' Minister, Alex Chalk MP, across this period; these meetings do not have papers, but an introductory email outlining the nature of these meetings has been provided (Exhibit OVC/10 – INQ000128963).
- iii. 4 November 2020 – the VC held a meeting with the Attorney General where they looked to discuss rape, domestic abuse and wider victims' work. An agenda is available on request.

Hidden Harms Summit

63. The Prime Minister hosted a virtual Hidden Harms Summit on 21 May 2020. This comprised a number of sessions including an introduction from the Prime Minister, a safeguarding session with the Secretary of State for Education, a policing session with the Home Secretary and a victim support session with the Lord Chancellor. The VC attended this event.
64. The report from the event contains immediate actions and next steps. This includes an action to *“place victims at the centre of Coronavirus recovery plans on criminal justice, working to ensure they receive the support they need from the very beginning of the criminal justice process right through to the end and - by broadening the availability of Section 28 hearings - supporting vulnerable victims to give evidence in court.”*

Wales

65. The VC's remit covers England and Wales and the majority of engagements in the attached spreadsheet cover both countries. However, there are a number of meetings and communications that are specific to Wales, namely:
- i. 30 June 2020, the VC spoke at a public webinar on the implications of COVID-19 and the criminal justice system in Wales. The VC twitter account later tweeted: *“Such a good event. Discussing Covid and the future of the courts. All the Welsh Crown courts are now functioning again. Come on England!”*
 - ii. The VC's diary first included an invitation to the All Wales Criminal Justice Board on 10 December 2020. This is followed by further regular invitations and attendance. The All Wales Criminal Justice Board considered COVID recovery. Papers are available on request.
 - iii. The VC was invited to the All Wales Victims and Witness Group from 7 December 2020 and again in November 2021 and February 2022, notes are available on request.
 - iv. The OVC could not locate any records of joint meetings including the VC, and representatives of both the UK and Welsh Governments. However, organisations representing both England and Wales (e.g. Victim Support) also attended the previously mentioned COVID19 Victim and Witness Silver Command Group. Organisations representing Welsh victims (e.g. Welsh Women's Aid) and covering both England and Wales (e.g. Safelives) were invited to the previously mentioned VAWG sector call.
 - v. The OVC maintained ongoing engagement and monitoring of the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on victims' services through the previously mentioned meeting with

PCC representatives. Representatives of the Welsh PCCs were invited to these meetings. This statement includes extant records that the OVC has been able to locate demonstrating issued raised and responses. Whilst these areas will have impacted Wales, the OVC was not able to locate any documents that suggest decision-making was changed as a result of OVC engagement with the Welsh Government.

Further meetings and correspondence

66. The VC's diary included a range of further meetings with government agencies outlined in the attached spreadsheet including:

- i. A Home Office meeting to discuss retail support to victims of domestic abuse on 9 April 2020. Diary invitation available.
- ii. Meeting with representatives of Downing Street on 24 April (no papers) and 20 May 2020 (diary invitation available) including discussions on the Hidden Harms Summit.
- iii. A meeting with Linda Brown, Chief Executive of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme on COVID response on 6 May 2020. Briefing prepared for the meeting is available.

67. No minutes of these meetings are held by OVC.

68. The VC held a conference call with Rebecca Hilsenrath, the then Chief Executive of the Equality and Human Rights Commissioner, on 7 May 2020. The agenda includes items on COVID and increases in VAWG as well as COVID-19 and delays to jury trials and the impact on VAWG victims. No minutes of these meetings are held by the OVC.

69. The VC's diary included a range of further stakeholder meetings including with the National Police Chief's Council, Police and Crime Commissioners and victim sector stakeholders. These meetings are outlined in the attached spreadsheet with further details of the meetings.

70. Key letters are mentioned throughout this statement. The attached spreadsheet includes a list of relevant letters located by the OVC.

Victim support services

Key Worker Status of Victim Support Workers

71. The VC raised a range of issues regarding victim support services.

72. 19/3/2020 – the Victims' Commissioner wrote to the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson MP, asking for:

- i. Domestic abuse and sexual assault professionals to be included in contingency planning so that these services could replace loss of capacity through staff who are unwell or in isolation.
- ii. The Government to include domestic abuse and sexual assault professionals and all victim support professionals to be included in the list of key workers.

73. On the day following her initial letter to the Prime Minister (20/3/2020), the VC published a news item on the VC website welcoming the Government's decision to include victim support workers as key workers.

Additional Funding

74. The VC also addressed funding needs for support services and flagged the need for additional funding for support services to adapt to the non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) and to respond to increased demand including by writing to the Prime Minister on 19/03/2020 in the above-mentioned letter flagging the need for additional funding for support services to absorb increases in demand.

75. On 25/03/2020 – the VC attended her first MoJ run group (later called Silver Command, referred to above) where Catherine Hinwood, a senior civil servant in the MoJ, addressed victim support services asking for information on funding needed to scale up their services as well as noting that the MoJ / Government recognised the need for additional funding and that this was being considered at pace.

76. On 30/03/2020 – the VC established a weekly conference call with the PCCs and their representatives to discuss the impact of funding on frontline services. On 07/04/2020, the MoJ run 'Silver' group then started receiving feedback from the VC on this weekly call. On 06/4/2020 – the VC published a news item highlighting the need for support services to be given funding to resource home working costs and increasing demand.

77. On 09/4/2020 – The VC wrote and published a joint letter with the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, Association of Police and Crime Commissioners and London Victims' Commissioner urging various Government ministers to put funding in place for domestic abuse and VAWG support services and accommodation.

78. Following the VC's calls for increased funding for support services, she published a news item on 11/4/2020 welcoming measures for those experiencing or at risk of domestic abuse including £2m for helplines and online support services for victims of domestic abuse. The item notes that this should be the start of a comprehensive support package.

79. On 15/04/2020 – during an appearance at the Home Affairs Select Committee. The VC argued that the Government should change the way that financial support is being rolled

out to charities (via PCCs) to enable smaller charities to access funds. She also called for funding to be ringfenced for domestic abuse charities.

80. The Home Secretary wrote to the VC on 20/04/2020 saying that she was responding to the VC's letter to the Prime Minister on 19/3/2020 and a conversation (not in the VC's diary) on 9 April. The letter confirmed that support service workers are included in the definition of key worker. It recognised funding needs and stated it was considering how to best ensure continuity of services. It also acknowledged funds already in place for helplines and online services.
81. The VC published a further news story on 23/4/2020 welcoming a further funding boost to support online and helpline services for victims.
82. On 24/04/2020 – the VC met with Sarah Barrett, from Downing Street, to discuss support for victims during COVID19.
83. On 28/04/2020 – the VC gave evidence at the Justice Committee outlined the need for funding for victim support services and for this to be distributed quickly.
84. The VC published a news article on 19 May 2020 acknowledging that the MoJ had published details of £25m extra funding for domestic abuse and sexual violence services made available due to COVID19. The article also acknowledged an additional planned £2m Home Office funding for domestic abuse services affected by COVID-19 and urged the quick release of funds. This was followed by a news article the VC published on 26 June welcoming the £22m that the MoJ distributed to 548 victim support services to maintain services and manage a surge in demand due to COVID19. The VC is quoted as saying: *"The MoJ has been the swiftest to finalise and distribute emergency funding to the victims' sector during COVID and I congratulate them on their efforts to make the process as simple and as fast as possible."* The VC also highlighted the need for ongoing and longer-term funding for these services.
85. On 03/11/2020 - the VC and Domestic Abuse Commissioner wrote to the Lord Chancellor as the UK returned to lockdown conditions, calling for a second round of extraordinary funding to the end of the financial year and asking for guaranteed longer-term funding. This was reiterated on 5/11/2020 when the VC published a blog calling for additional emergency funding for victim support services. The VC and Domestic Abuse Commissioner further argued for longer term sustainable funding for domestic abuse and VAWG services via a letter to the Prime Minister and Chancellor on 24/11/2020.
86. On Sunday 15 November, 12 days after the VC and Domestic Abuse Commissioner wrote to the Lord Chancellor to ask for additional extraordinary funding for support services, the Government announced c£10m to support the rise in demand for domestic abuse and sexual violence services. The VC published a news item on 16 November welcoming the funding and reiterating the need for longer term funding for those services.

87. On 18 November 2020, Alex Chalk, the Victims' Minister, wrote to the VC and Domestic Abuse Commissioner announcing c£10m for domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations to continue to provide support to victims. The letter recognised concerns around the sustainability of funding and highlighting a Government commitment to developing a Victim Funding Strategy for more sustainable footing in the long term.
88. On 01/2/2021, the Government announced a further £40m for support services of victims of rape and domestic abuse.
89. On 14/5/2021, Kit Malthouse, the then Minister of State for the Criminal Justice System, wrote to the VC responding to her letter of 20 April 2021 (this letter cannot be located by the OVC) apologising for the delays in confirming allocation of funding to PCCs, informing her that they were confirmed on 6 May 2021 and pointing to work that is ongoing on developing the Victim Funding Strategy.

Domestic abuse

90. The VC raised a number of issues on the topic of domestic abuse, these are broken down below into the topics of key worker status, funding for support services, accommodation for victims, information campaigns and the response to domestic homicides. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner was appointed in 2019 and conducted significant work on domestic abuse during COVID-19.

Domestic abuse – key worker status for domestic abuse professionals

Issues raised

91. The VC wrote to the Prime Minister on 19 March 2020 in a letter exhibited as OVC/3 (INQ000108585). This highlighted the risk to victims of domestic abuse and asked the Prime Minister to *"Include domestic abuse, sexual assault and indeed all victim support professionals in the list of key workers."*

Response

92. The VC published a news report on 20 March 2020 welcoming the Government's decision to include victim support workers (this includes relevant domestic abuse professionals) as key workers.
93. The Home Secretary wrote to the VC on 20 April, responding to the VC's letter of 19 March. This correspondence is exhibited as OVC/5 (INQ000108587). The Home Secretary's response states: *"You will be aware by now that those working with victims of crime both at the front line and via helplines or other services supporting the delivery of key services have already been included in the definition of key worker. I hope this will help to ensure that such staff can continue in their roles."*

Domestic abuse – funding for support services

Issues raised

94. The VC argued for funding for support services for victims of domestic abuse. This is included within the section on victim support services above.

Domestic abuse – accommodation for victims

Issues raised

95. The VC's joint 8 April 2020 letter with the APCC and other commissioners urged the relevant Secretaries of State to *"put funding in place to support services and accommodation."* (Exhibit OVC/6 – INQ000108588).

96. The VC and Domestic Abuse Commissioner wrote to hotel Chief Executives on 9 April 2020 calling on them to offer accommodation to women fleeing domestic abuse who are unable to access a refuge. This was reflected in the VC's social media and picked up in British Vogue.

97. The VC published a news item on 11 April 2020, responding to the Home Secretary led news briefing that day. It states *"Responding to Ms Patel's assurance that the Home Office was looking at ways to provide alternative emergency accommodation for those victims who have to leave their homes, Dame Vera said: 'I was impressed with the speed at which the Government moved to house homeless people to protect them; this can and should be replicated as a matter of urgency for those people suffering abuse at home who need a safe space to leave.'"*

98. On 15 April 2020, the VC gave evidence at the Home Affairs Select Committee alongside other commissioners where the challenge of accessing accommodation for domestic abuse victims was discussed. This included discussion of hotels and universities providing emergency accommodation.

99. The VC and Domestic Abuse Commissioner wrote to the Secretary of State for Housing, Community and Local Government (Exhibit OVC/7 – INQ000108589) on 4 May 2020 urging him to follow up on their letter to hotel chief executives, sent on 9 April. The letter noted that *"there has already been a positive response from hotel chains, as well as other providers of accommodation, such as universities"*. The letter also observed that the Government had been asked to underwrite the cost of this accommodation. It further noted the significant reduction in available refuge spaces. Additionally, the letter raised problems with 'follow-on' accommodation and asked the department to consider whether perpetrators should be housed in similar accommodation to enable victims to remain safe at home.

Response

100. The Home Secretary wrote to the VC on 20 April 2020 noting that they “*recognise that for some people their home is not a safe place. This Government is committed to doing all that it can to ensure that the vulnerable in society continue to be safeguarded as we seek to protect public health.*” The Home Secretary also noted that “*I understand that Government guidance has been issued to those managing running multiple occupancy buildings on how to operate safely at this time.*”

Domestic abuse – information campaigns

101. The VC’s letter of 19 March 2020 to the Prime Minister highlighted the importance of communication, particularly asking the Government to consider “*Production of Public Health England guidance for statutory agencies on how to support domestic abuse victims and child victims who are self-isolating or otherwise endangered by the current pandemic*” and stating that “*it is also important for the Government to send a clear message that the Police will not allow the pandemic to downgrade tolerance of domestic abuse or sexual crime.*”

102. The VC published a blog post of 6 April 2020 highlighting the importance of promoting the message that charities and helplines are working and refuges are available. It noted that “*that message needs to be promoted lest people trapped in their homes fear that Coronavirus has close those services in parallel with shops.*” It noted that the Home Secretary had published one newspaper column on domestic abuse but remarked that “*We need the Home Secretary standing at the podium in the daily news conference with the Chancellor, announcing a major rescue package for this charity sector.*”

103. The VC and Domestic Abuse Commissioner met with Krisztina Katona, the Head of Public Protection Unit, at the Home Office to discuss work support from retailers for victims of domestic abuse including the possibility of a code word.

104. The VC published a news item on 11 April 2020 recognising that the Home Secretary had announced a “*new publicity campaign aimed at raising awareness and reassuring those who may be isolated as a result of abuse that help and support is available.*” This acknowledged the communication campaign announced by the Home Office but called for further measures. In particular, stating “*I would like to see this extended to offer other initiatives which enable victims to discreetly make others aware of their situation in locations still accessible, such as supermarkets or pharmacies similar to schemes in other European countries.*”

105. The VC gave oral evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee on 15 April 2020 where she further proposed a national scheme be urgently established, covering

supermarkets and pharmacies, to enable domestic abuse victims to seek confidential support through the use of a code word similarly to the 'Ask for Angela' campaign or through a help button on online retail portals.

106. The Home Secretary wrote to the VC on 20 April 2020 stating that her *"officials will also be working with you, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner and other key stakeholders on developing a codeword, or similar scheme, that victims of abuse may be able to use at retail outlets if they do not feel safe accessing help by other means."*

107. On 23 April 2020, the VC published a news item welcoming the MoJ's awareness campaign on sexual violence stating: *"This is excellent work by the MoJ, which has worked closely with the leading sexual violence charities and me to establish an information page about sexual abuse during the Covid lockdown. This page – and the existing Domestic Abuse advice page – are vital in providing information to those in need."*

108. The VC was invited to join an 'Ask for Ani' Advisory Group that sought to *"provide advice to the Home Office on the development and implementation of the 'Ask for Ani' domestic abuse codeword scheme."* The OVC's then Chief Executive Russell A'Court attended part of the meeting on 8 July 2020 (papers are available on request). The OVC has located records of further meetings on Wednesday 16 September 2020 (attended by the VAWG Policy Manager, Beccy Shortt) and 20 July 2021, an agenda is available (not attended by the VC or any OVC staff).

109. The VC published a news item on 4 May 2020 welcoming the latest element of the Governments 'You Are Not Alone' campaign, notably the focus on employers. The VC is quoted as stating *"I welcome the government engaging employers in the task we must all share in society of keeping our eyes open and doing our best to help victims of domestic abuse."*

110. The VC published a news item on 5 November 2020 further highlighting the importance of communication at the start of a new lockdown. She is quoted as saying: *"It is vital that we act quickly and send a clear message through the press and social media that the police and victim services are fully working. Lockdown will not stop them. We need to echo what the Prime Minister said, that victims and survivors of all crime can leave their homes and access support "to escape injury or harm". Measures can and will be out in place to protect them if they seek help. Let me repeat that: victims are allowed to break lock down if they feel they are in danger. These messages must be repeated time and again, locally and nationally. Professionals who deal with the public, including social workers, teachers, medical workers, must also pass this message on. And those who are working on track and trace must also be trained to recognise the signs and ask the right questions, so that they too can alert the authorities if they have concerns. During the last lockdown period, swift action from the government helped to ensure vital funds were made available to victim*

services, particularly domestic abuse. And there was a significant growth in public awareness as a result of the You Are Not Alone campaign.”

111. The Victims’ Minister, Alex Chalk MP, wrote to the VC on 18 November 2020, welcoming her recognition of previous communication campaigns and noting that Government was considering a further communications push for the November lockdown.

112. The VC published a news item on 14 January 2021 welcoming the ‘Ask for ANI’ codeword scheme that enabled those at risk or suffering from abuse to discreetly signal that they need help and access to support at a number of pharmacies across the UK. The VC is quoted as stating: *“The groundwork for this scheme was laid by charities and survivors. I congratulate them on their success, and I am grateful to pharmacies and the Home Office for developing this further. I urge the government to work closely with the sector to further develop, monitor and evaluate this scheme over time to ensure it safeguards victims’ welfare.”*

Domestic Abuse – response to domestic homicides

113. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner and VC wrote to the Lord Chancellor, Attorney General and Home Secretary on 5 March 2021 calling for a wide range of improvements in response to domestic homicides. The VC published a news article pointing to the letter on 8 March 2021. The letter points to the case of Anthony Williams, which the letter states was *“the first trial for a domestic homicide that happened during the COVID-19 pandemic”* and points to public outrage at a mental health defence used that he was suffering from a mental health episode due to the stress of lockdown.

114. The VC published a news item on 11 March 2021 welcoming an announcement by the Lord Chancellor, Robert Buckland, following the letter, where the Lord Chancellor says that he has asked his officials to review sentencing laws. The VC also published a tweet pointing to this news item.

Anti-social behaviour

115. The VC wrote a joint letter to the Home Secretary on 14 August 2020 alongside Baroness Newlove (former Victims’ Commissioner) and the chief executives of the anti-social behaviour (**ASB**) charities ASB Help and Resolve UK. The letter asked for immediate action to deal with a surge of ASB triggered by the COVID-19 lockdown. In particular, it highlighted:

- i. A spike in ASB since lockdown.
- ii. That all, but one of the recommendations from ‘Living a Nightmare’ (a research paper on ASB published by the previous Victims’ Commissioner) had not been implemented.

- iii. Called for the Government to encourage Community Safety Partnerships to set up 'Nightingale taskforces' to quantify and tackle the backlog of ASB complaints.
 - iv. Called for the Government to implement the recommendations from 'Living a Nightmare'.
116. The Home Secretary responded to the VC's letter of 14 August in her reply on 17 September 2020. In her reply, she noted:
- i. the Crime Survey of England and Wales (**CSEW**) show a continued fall in ASB incidents up to March.
 - ii. That she regularly met with stakeholders and discussed the potential rise of ASB in lockdown, often related to concerns on breaching of lockdown measures.
 - iii. That it was vital that victims have a voice and pointed to the Community Trigger (the ASB Case Review, or Community Trigger, enables victims to hold local agencies to account via a multi-agency case review, held to discuss and seek to resolve the anti-social behaviour).
 - iv. That the ASB Strategy Board had agreed in October 2019 that more action was required to increase awareness of the Community Trigger and outlining work that the Home Office has completed on this.
 - v. That the awareness raising was the starting point to address issues and progress would be discussed at the next ASB Strategy Board.
117. The VC further wrote to the Home Secretary on 14 October 2020. The letter raised a number of points, including:
- i. Noted that the Home Secretary appeared to downplay the VC's concerns on the rise of ASB and pointing to evidence that supports the view that ASB has increased.
 - ii. Pointed to the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC) who had "*echoed my warning that fresh peaks of ASB will be sparked by tensions within communities as more people are cooped up at home for longer periods.*"
 - iii. Pointed out that ASB "*can have a corrosive effect on public morale and community cohesion at a time when it is so important that we all come together.*"
 - iv. Called for local taskforces to take on work to reduce ASB.
 - v. Welcomed the Home Office work to refresh its guidance but stated that this was not sufficient.
 - vi. Urged the Government to act.
118. The Minister for Safeguarding, Victoria Atkins MP, wrote to the VC on 6 November 2020, responding to her letter of 14 October. The letter outlined work that the Home Office had completed in relation to 'Living a Nightmare' and outlined evidence that ASB had not increased. The letter also pointed to increased funding for police and local government to

step up enforcement of coronavirus rules, enabling increased patrols and other possibilities.

119. The VC wrote a further letter to Victoria Atkins MP on 15 January 2021. This letter responded to the Minister's letter of 6 November. It further disputed the extent to which the recommendations from 'Living a Nightmare' had been implemented, including evidence from a range of sources. The letter further discussed increases of ASB during lockdown noting *"In short, the police, victim services and the third sector are sending a unified message of sharp increases in the level of ASB whilst communities are under lockdown conditions and I am not sure why these are in dispute"*. The letter requested a range of actions moving forward. In relation to COVID19, it requested *"Local authorities and police should be invited to report on current levels of ASB, with a view to providing additional "nightingale" support to those local authorities experiences sharp spikes in ASB and are struggling to cope. The onus would be on the local authority to make the case for assistance."*

120. The VC published a blog on 5 February 2021 on ASB. The post points to evidence that there had been an increase in ASB outside of lockdown breaches and reiterating the points outlined in the 14 August letter to the Home Secretary.

121. The Home Office ran an ASB Strategy Board. The VC attended this on 17 February 2021 with the Chief Executive attending later meetings in 2021. This meeting was not COVID specific, but did include some discussion on COVID. Agendas and minutes are available.

Courts

Issues raised

122. The VC published a news item on 11 May 2020 responding to the Lord Chancellor's announcement that a few trials would start in London and Cardiff after jury trials were suspended on 23 March 2020. The VC welcomed the announcement, adding that *"these trial trials will have to be monitored closely and victims' rights must be protected. It is disappointing that as Victims Commissioner I am not on the group which has organised this since victims are concerned about the risks and how it will work. It is an ideal time to put remote evidence centres, which exist in many police areas and are underused, at the centre of trials to save victims from the anxiety of attending court or running into their adversary on the way."*

123. The VC met with Susan Acland-Hood, the Chief Executive of HMCTS, on 1 April 2020 as part of a regular catch up.

124. The VC gave oral evidence at the Justice Committee on 28 April 2020 where she noted that there was already a Crown Court backlog before COVID19. She discussed the impact that this had on victims including not knowing whether or not their case will go forward, worries about whether lockdown restrictions allowed them to go to court, confusion and chaos and concern that victims and witnesses *"will not stick at it."*
125. The MoJ set up a COVID-19 'Magistrate court – victim and witness issues' meeting on 29 April 2020 which met until August 2020. The group aimed *"to look at what can/needs to be done to facilitate and support witness engagement and attendance, and zero in on domestic abuse cases."* The meeting was chaired by Catherine Hinwood, a senior civil servant in the MoJ. The group considered issues such as remote hearings and witness care units. It included agenda items on COVID-19 triage processes and updates on crown courts. The VC had actions to share information on remote evidence centres and praises the COVID19 triage process.
126. The VC wrote to the Lord Chancellor on 2 June 2020 and asked him to expand s28 (pre-recording of evidence) and to consider using unused courtrooms to record this evidence.
127. The VC was invited to join the 'Jury Trials Restart Working Group' on 25 June 2020. The group was run by HMCTS and looked at restarting jury trials, court backlog and court issues.
128. 30 June 2020, the VC spoke at a public webinar on the implications of COVID and the criminal justice system in Wales. The VC twitter account later tweeted: *"Such a good event. Discussing Covid and the future of the courts. All the Welsh Crown courts are now functioning again. Come on England!"*
129. The VC was invited to the first 'Extending Criminal Court Operating Hours Working Group', run by HMCTS, on 3 July 2020. This meeting discussed updates and proposals for courts. The VC made interventions including the need to engage PCCs in this work.
130. The VC gave oral evidence to the Justice Committee on court capacity on 2 March 2021. The VC highlighted problems with court capacity and victims. In particular, the negative impact of uncertainty of court dates and last minute cancellations on victims and witnesses; the impact on the wellbeing to victims of extended delays and long waits getting to courts and the *"poorer victim support because of the pressure on the organisation."* She noted *"I think that we are giving much less good service than we used to give to victims. I guess that we will lose some because they will not want to go through the coming and going again, or simply cannot take the idea of a trial date that in some areas may be as late as 2022, which is a problem in loss of confidence and perhaps people who are guilty not being convicted and those individuals not getting justice."*

131. The VC's Annual Report is published in July 2021 pointed to ongoing problems with the courts. In particular, the ongoing courts backlog and consequent stretch on victims' services as well as low use of remote evidence centres.

Other areas of note

Fraud

132. The VC drew attention to the issue of fraud. She called attention to an increase in fraud in her Justice Committee appearance on 28 April 2020. She further called it a "*epidemic within a pandemic*" in a blog she published on 9 August 2021. The VC gave Oral evidence at the Justice Committee, on 22 February 2022, considering fraud and the impact on victims where she noted that fraud "*was growing anyway, but it has probably had an extra growth spurt*" when discussing the impact of the pandemic.

133. There is ongoing cross-departmental work responding to fraud.

Stalking

134. The VC published a blog on 28 July 2021 on stalking during COVID19. The blog said that the lockdown created further opportunities for perpetrators and that victims face poor response from the criminal justice system. The blog called for Stalking Protection Orders to be used and VAWG Strategy to examine low conviction rates.

Prisoner release

135. The VC published a news item on 9 April 2020 that welcomed measures to support victims as prisoner early release began. This included safeguards and support for victims. The VC discussed this in more detail in oral evidence to the Justice Committee on 28 April where she further outlined restrictions placed on the cohort being considered for release and measures taken by the probation service so that they *had "done everything that it was realistically possible to do to try to satisfy victims that they were safe."*

Research

136. The VC did not commission or conduct any specific research relating to COVID19 or the impact of decisions made in response to COVID19 and the impact on victims. This statement is applicable for both England and Wales.
137. The VC continued to conduct research on victims' issues and published the results on their website. This statement is applicable for both England and Wales.
138. The VC met with Crest Advisory on 16 June 2020 for an initial discussion on their research into understanding how COVID19 is impacting the criminal justice system and, in particular, whether it will lead to permanent shifts in public policy.

The impact of COVID-19 and maintain effective 'business as usual'

139. The VC published a news item on 7 April 2020 encouraging responses to the Government's consultation on the Victims' Code and noting that "the original deadline for submissions to the consultation has been pushed back from 16 April to 28 May to allow interested parties the time to focus on responding to the Coronavirus outbreak."
140. The VC wrote to the Home Secretary on 30 March 2020 asking for an extension to the consultation on pre-charge bail. The VC published a news item on 23 April welcoming this extension.
141. The VC and Domestic Abuse Commissioner wrote to the Home Secretary and Lord Chancellor on 27 April 2020 VC asking them to delay the Domestic Abuse Bill, in part because services needed time to consider the Bill and were stretched due to pandemic.
142. The VC and Domestic Abuse Commissioner wrote to the Deputy Prime Minister on 16 December 2021 asking for extension to Victims' Bill consultation in response to new COVID lockdowns. The Victims' Minister, Tom Pursglove, replied on 26 January 2022 granting extensions.
143. The VC wrote to the Victims' Minister, Alex Chalk MP, on 25 September 2020 expressing concern that the Victims' Panel had not met. The VC further wrote to the Victims' Minister, Tom Pursglove, asking for the Victims' Panel to be reinstated in January 2022. The Victims' Minister wrote to the VC on 11 March 2022 agreeing to reinstate the Panel.

Longer term learning and legacy

144. The Silver Command meeting, run by the MoJ, has continued to meet, recently changing its name to the 'Victims and Witness Sector Engagement Group' and is continuing to provide a forum for MoJ senior civil servants and ministers to meet with the victims' sector. Meetings are now monthly.
145. The VC engagement with PCCs has continued as a mechanism to maintain dialogue and engagement. This now meets monthly and has been renamed 'Victims' Hubs' meeting.
146. HM Government published the Victims Funding Strategy in May 2022, outlining aims to fund the sector more strategically, remove barriers to access and to implement clear and consistent outcomes. Funding for victims' services continues to be considered and addressed by Government and stakeholders. The Justice Committee ran pre-legislative scrutiny in summer 2022 on the draft Victims' Bill. This has been considered by the Government in their response, published in January 2023. The scrutiny outlines the importance of co-ordinated and cohesive funding streams. The Government response

outlines how the Victims' Bill will seek to address these areas and commits to considering how to bring transparency about funding streams and wider activity. The Justice Committee further provides recommendations to ensure that community-based services are available to victims of domestic and sexual abuse. The Government response outlines how the Bill will help to deliver this and points to work underway outside of the legislation including recent increases to multi-year funding for PCC-funded victim services to a minimum of £460m from 2022/23 to 2024/25 as well as increases to NHS funding for sexual and domestic abuse.

147. The Home Office continues to lead work addressing ASB. The ASB Strategy Board continues to meet and has developed principles. These include "empower the public to act and make them feel safer" and "set expectations about the standard of service victims will receive." The Prime Minister's speech on 'building a better future' on 4 January 2023 referenced ASB, noting "*this government will work tirelessly to crack down on anti-social behaviour, giving police forces, mayors, and local authorities the tools they need*". The OVC have attended roundtables in January 2023, considering how the government can respond to ASB and have reshared the 'Living a Nightmare' document referenced in correspondence between the VC and ministers across the COVID period.

148. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner continues her role as an independent voice that speaks on behalf of victims and survivors of domestic abuse and holding government and agencies to account. In November 2022, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner published their mapping exercise where she noted a "postcode lottery and patchwork of provision."

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief of its truth.

Signed Personal Data

Print name KATIE KEMPEN

Dated 17/1/2023

Exhibit List

OVC/1 – INQ000108583 Spreadsheet outlining VC news items, tweets, relevant diary entries and letters.

OVC/2 – INQ000108584 COVID19 Victim and Witness Silver Command Group Terms of Reference.

OVC/3 – INQ000108585 19 March letter from the VC to the Prime Minister.

OVC/4 – INQ000108586 Note for first meeting between VC and PCC representatives.

OVC/5 – INQ000000 20 April letter from Home Secretary in response to the VC's letter of 19/3/20.

OVC/6 – INQ000000 8 April letter from VC, APCC and other Commissioners to the Home Secretary, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Housing asking for urgent action on violence against women and girls.

OVC/7 – INQ000108589 4 May letter from VC, and Domestic Abuse Commissioner to Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government outlining challenges for accommodation for victims of domestic abuse, pointing to solutions such as hotels and removing perpetrators.

OVC/8 – INQ000108590 Chronology outlining VC news items, tweets, relevant diary entries and letters.

OVC/9 – INQ000108591 Glossary for OVC statement terms.

OVC/10 – INQ000128963 Introductory emails dated 1 April 2020

OVC/11 – INQ000182695 Note of the VC's meeting with the Attorney General on 22 April 2020