

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP  
Home Secretary

06 November 2020

Dear Home Secretary

## Weekly Update

### Hidden Harms Winter Preparedness

We had a helpful meeting with officials on Monday to discuss Hidden Harms in the context of new national restrictions. It is vital that we repeat the good practice that was followed during the first lockdown whilst learning lessons and changing our behaviour accordingly. Further to our meeting on Monday I have:

1. Met each of **Refuge, Women's Aid and Respect** to listen to their concerns and understand what more we can do to continue to support victims throughout the difficult period ahead. A few of the key points raised during these calls were:
  - **Communications:** all were keen that HMG uses its communications platform to let victims know that they are still able to flee abusive households. My office have been speaking with Press colleagues and you and I are, at the time of writing, due to imminently receive advice on scaling up comms in this space;
  - **Testing:** several organisations flagged that providing Refuge workers and survivors with the ability to receive timely access to Covid testing would speed up the referral process. I have asked officials to pick up with counterparts in DHSC; and
  - **Funding:** all were extremely grateful for the first tranche of HMG funding from the Chancellor's emergency fund. This money has built capacity in helplines and web chat which organisations will be maintaining in the coming months – which is welcome news. All three organisations pressed more on longer term funding beyond the next financial year rather than on emergency funding for the next month (which wasn't raised). Refuge raised particular concerns which I have passed onto Kelly Tolhurst in MHCLG (see below).

Next week I will be having similar discussions with: the DA Commissioner, Safelives, Karma Nirvana, DCC Louisa Rolfe, PCCs.

2. Conducted a **Deep Dive** with Kit and officials on Serious Violence, County Lines and Modern Slavery in the context of winter preparedness. This was another helpful session where officials gave us comfort that they are continuing to deploy good practice learnt from the first lockdown. To highlight some of the outcomes we would like to pursue further:
  - **County Lines:** we have learnt that County Lines is a resilient business model which adapted to lockdown by shifting drugs lines from rail to road. As such, we have asked officials to pick up with policing colleagues to ensure we are being operationally 'smart' in the month ahead;
  - **Schools:** at the risk of repeating a frustration you know well, we need the DfE to explain how they are prioritising school attendance (particularly in PRUs) to ensure we are tackling hidden harms. Modern Slavery officials have data which shows that referrals to the NRM from County Lines victims significantly dropped when schools re-opened this year. Kit and I will be asking to meet Nick Gibb next week to relay this information.
3. Attended a useful Winter Preparedness 'exercise' hosted by Shona on alongside James and Susan.

## **Domestic Abuse**

Ministers Chalk (MoJ) and Tolhurst (MHCLG) and I met for our Domestic Abuse tri-lat this week. We also joined by Minister Ford (DfE). This remains a useful forum for sharing intelligence at Ministerial level. In particular, I asked that Minister Tolhurst to keep us abreast of Refuge space in the coming weeks. MHCLG tally bed spaces on a weekly basis which we must keep under constant review.

## **VAWG**

I met Mike Cunningham to discuss so called Honour Based Abuse (HBA) and future guidance that the College of Policing would be producing on this issue. We had a good conversation on the challenges forces see in responding to HBA and a positive outcome from the meeting is that the College will now be extending the scope of the guidance currently being developed for first responders to include guidance for investigators. I also suggested Mike informally consult the sector on their guidance which he took on as a helpful steer.

## **Rape Review**

Officials provided me with their weekly update on the Rape Review. I understand you will be considering the advice from officials on this shortly. My view (which I appreciate you will have through your Private Office) is that we have made a good start but must be more ambitious if we are to show the PM at the CJTF that we are matching his desire to tackle this issue.

## **CSEA**

I was pleased to have the opportunity to open the third meeting of the External Reference Group, and to thank the group for their invaluable scrutiny and constructive criticism throughout the process. I heard from officials the progress that has been made, particularly through a number of bilateral meetings with ERG participants, in taking into account a variety of different views and arriving at a product on which we can hopefully reach final agreement.

## **Modern Slavery**

I met Maria Miller, Karen Bradley and Frank Field this week to discuss their recently published report: Sexual Exploitation, Modern Slavery, and the Law. This is an extremely useful addendum to their Independent Review of the Modern Slavery Act, and addresses the link between buying sex work and exploitation / trafficking.

I was interested by their suggestion that further work should be carried out (possibly by a think tank) to assess how different models in different countries address this problem. A recent impact assessment of Northern Ireland's criminalisation of sex buying has not provided equivocal evidence on the success of that change in policy. I am aware of the difficulties for government to pursue such a line of work / research and would not be comfortable committing to do so yet. The meeting was useful also to discuss our plans for the VAWG Strategy: we should consider the inclusion of a definition of sexual violence when consulting the sector - I am particularly keen that we are able to capture offending which takes place (partly or wholly) online.

## **Serious Violence**

I separately met with Maria Miller to discuss rising instances of County Lines in Basingstoke, which yielded a number of clear actions moving forward. Officials will link Maria up with her local VRU to hear more about their work, and I will write to her soon with more detailed background on her queries. In relation to the PPP Bill, she raised an interesting policy query as to whether the Serious Violence Duty would mandate cooperating across geographical areas. I await an answer from officials on this point.

## **Press**

I conducted a political interview on BBC Politics Live on Monday. The interview focussed on the Coronavirus restriction announced last weekend where I was able to repeat the strong message from the PM and the Chancellor about the difficult but necessary steps we have taken.

## **Other engagement this week**

- National Policing Board
- Manifesto Delivery Board
- Briefing on self-generated indecent imagery

With kind regards,

**Personal Data**

**Victoria Atkins MP  
Minister for Safeguarding**