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Violence against women and girls (VAWG) newsletter

Introduction

Thank you to all who attended the VAWG inter-ministerial meeting on 14th June chaired by the Home Secretary. The VAWG sector was well represented with participants from a wide range of organisations, and Ministers attended from across Government including from Department for Communities and Local Government, the Ministry of Justice, and the Department for International Development. Informative presentations were followed by lively discussion about funding cuts to the sector, the work of the Child Exploitation Online Protection agency, and the Association of Chief Police Officers' review of police bureaucracy.

Future inter-ministerial meetings will focus on a single theme to allow a more in-depth discussion of the issues. The next meeting on 19th October to be organised jointly with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport will focus on the role that the media can play in tackling violence against women and girls. The last meeting of the year on 14th December, which will be attended again by representatives from the sector, will focus on international VAWG issues.

If you have any questions relating to violence against women and girls, please email us at: VAWGenquiries@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

Or tell us what you think: VAWGenquiries@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

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Helping Women Offenders

Work to help women offenders can continue at 26 community projects thanks to a one off £3.2m funding deal between the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and the Corston Independent Funders' Coalition.

These women's community services or 'one-stop-shops' are local hubs which provide effective rehabilitation and support for vulnerable women in the criminal justice system, many of whom have long histories of domestic or sexual abuse. Support is provided in a number of areas including accommodation, health, children and families, education, finance, benefit and debt.

Following the additional funding, announced on 11 May, these projects will now work to establish funding through local partnerships. NOMS has also made a commitment from 2012/13 to continue funding services with a proven track record of tackling offending behaviour amongst women. For further information visit:
<http://www.justice.gov.uk/news/newsrelease110511a.htm>

The Ministry of Justice and the Home Office (Government Equalities Office) are also providing funding to support Women's Breakout, an umbrella body for women's services, over the next 3 years to build capacity in this important sector.

The Ministry of Justice has been working with Women's Aid to provide guidance and resources to all those working with women offenders, in order to enable them to respond more effectively and consistently to those who are survivors of domestic and sexual violence. The Guidance 'Supporting Women Offenders who have experienced domestic and sexual violence' was published on 30 June 2011 and will be available shortly on the Women's Aid website www.womensaid.org.uk

Ministry of Justice Rape Support Fund

As part of the Government's commitment to improve funding for rape support centres, 65 centres around the country will receive grant funding totalling nearly £3m a year for the next three years from the Ministry of Justice Rape Support Fund.

A full list of the successful centres can be found on the Ministry of Justice website at:
<http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/transparency-data/victims-witnesses-funding-awards.htm>

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Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) Violence against Women Assurance

In April 2011 the first assessment of a new VAW Assurance system was carried out by all CPS Areas to ensure that its handling of VAW prosecutions meets the expected standard and encourages access to support for victims. The first round of six monthly reports to the Chief Operating Officer and the Director of Public Prosecutions was provided by every Chief Crown Prosecutor and VAW Coordinator, on the quality and efficiency of VAW prosecutions, including a qualitative assessment of 25 per cent of rape prosecutions.

CPS management data, shows that successful prosecutions for domestic violence (DV) (from charge to conviction) have significantly increased from 65% in 2006-07 to 72% in 2009-10, against an increasing volume of prosecutions, from 57,361 to 74,113. In 2010-11 the conviction rate for domestic violence was held at 72%, against a further increase in volume to 82,187 – an 11% increase on last year alone. CPS prosecutions are also more efficient – guilty pleas have risen by seven per cent, from 58% to 65% over the same time period.

The volume of rapes prosecuted, has also risen by 29%. From 3,264 charged defendants in 2006-07 to 4,208 in 2010-11. In 2006-07, 54% of charged rape defendants were convicted for that crime or another offence. This rose to 59% by 2010-11. In all CPS Areas, rape cases are now prosecuted by specialist rape prosecutors who have completed a compulsory two day training course on rape and serious sexual offences.

Legal guidance for prosecutors in cases involving Rape and/or Domestic Violence allegations

Final legal guidance was announced by the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) on 7 July 2011 at the Women’s Aid Annual National Conference. Speaking at the Conference the DPP emphasised that “tackling violence against women remains a priority for the Crown Prosecution Service”, and he thanked those who responded and helped to inform the final guidance.

The referral of cases to the Director via his Principal Legal Advisor (PLA) continues but with a significant change. It is important to note that the range of cases to be referred has been increased. **All cases involving an allegation of rape or domestic violence in which consideration is given to prosecuting the complainant for perverting the course of justice, or for an alternative offence such as wasting police time, must be referred.**

The guidance applies to cases where a complainant of rape or domestic violence makes a false allegation, retracts an original complaint, or takes back a retraction of the original complaint (referred to as a “double retraction”) and to all cases referred to the CPS by the police including those which are not thought to pass the Full Code Test (before any decision to charge or take no further action is communicated to the police).

The final guidance is now in force and published on the CPS website:

http://www.cps.gov.uk/legal/p_to_r/perverting_the_course_of_justice_-_rape_and_dv_allegations/

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Sex Offender Management

On 14th June the Home Office laid the proposal for 'The Sexual Offences Act 2003 (Remedial) Order 2011, that will implement the Supreme Court ruling in the case of F & Thompson v Secretary of State for the Home Department [2010]' and ensure that strict rules are put in place for considering whether sex offenders who are placed on the register for life should ever be removed. Further information can be found at:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/about-us/legislation/sexual-offences-remedial-order/>

Alongside this the Home Office has launched a targeted consultation on four key proposals to extend the notification requirements for registered sex offenders (RSOs), available at: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/about-us/consultations/notification-sex-offenders/>

This will ensure that the police are provided with important intelligence, allowing them to manage RSOs more robustly, and to prevent them from exploiting gaps in existing legislation to cause harm in the UK and overseas.

New ISVAs/IDVAs Website

An IDVA/ISVA website has been created in the North East Region to allow named members to network and share best practice and to gain the latest knowledge and information from colleagues using a forum facility. Due to the nature of the work involved, John Mace, PhD student at Newcastle University's Centre for Cybercrime and Computer Security worked alongside Northumbria LCJB to create a secure site, where access is controlled by usernames and passwords. If you are interested in joining the network please contact emma.moir.6389@northumbria.pnn.police.uk

DVPOs

Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs) were introduced as a pilot for one year in three police force areas – West Mercia, Wiltshire and Greater Manchester Police – from 30th June 2011. The government is strengthening the protection available to victims in these areas by enabling the police to apply for a civil Domestic Violence Protection Order which, if granted by the Magistrates Court, may ban the alleged perpetrator from contacting the victim or returning to the victim's address for a minimum of 14 days and maximum of 28 days. The pilot is designed to protect victims in the short term and give them the breathing space to consider their next steps, including pursuing longer term protection through a civil injunction application. Guidance on DVPOs can be found at:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime/violence-against-women-girls/dv-protection-orders/>

In the first three weeks of the pilot 19 DVPOs were granted by the courts with only 1 application refused.

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Department of Health Commissioning Services Guide

‘Commissioning services for women and children who experience violence or abuse – a guide for health commissioners’ was published on 8 April 2011

This guidance is designed to support health commissioners – in particular those commissioning primary care, mental health services, maternity care and sexual health services – to improve the commissioning of services for women and children who are victims of violence or abuse. The guidance provides suggested outcome measures, case examples (including service specifications to download) and advice on how to include the needs of victims of violence in Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs) –with the aim of developing these services in a way, which will help them to adapt to the changes to the NHS and public health. A copy of the guide can be found at:

http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh_125938.pdf

Developments in the area of sexual violence

A “Response to sexual violence needs assessments (RSVNA)” toolkit, informing the commissioning and development of co-ordinated specialist services for victims of sexual violence, was published by the Department of Health on 1 April 2011.

This document includes guidance for local partnerships on conducting a Response to Sexual Violence Needs Assessment. More information at:

http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh_126402.pdf

A study on the “Feasibility of Transferring Budget and Commissioning Responsibility for Forensic Sexual Offences Examination Work from the Police to the NHS”, has been published by the Health Services Management Centre at the University of Birmingham. The study, commissioned by the Department of Health and Home Office, reports on the cost and quality of forensic health services for sexual assault and establishes a robust evidence base for supporting a transfer from the police to the health service. A copy of the report is available at: <http://www.hsmc.bham.ac.uk/news/pdfs/forensic-sexual-offences-report.pdf>

After the consultation earlier this year on the Public health White Paper and related documents, the Government set out in July, a vision for public health, updating the progress made and setting out a timeline for completing the design of the new system. “Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Consultation on the Funding and Commissioning Routes for Public Health” proposed that the response to sexual violence could go to local authorities to mirror plans for open access sexual health services. “Health Lives, Healthy People: Update and Way Forward” indicates that the proposal will be reviewed in the light of the Early Adopter programme. A copy of the Update document can be seen at: <http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publichealth/Healthyliveshealthypeople/index.htm>

The voluntary “Early Adopter Programme” brings together individual police forces, primary care trusts and their local authority partners in partnership to develop the collaborative commissioning arrangements necessary to improve the joint response to custody health care. Participating forces have been invited to consider including sexual violence. More information at: http://www.west-midlands-pa.gov.uk/documents/committees/public/2011/10_LPolicing_14July2011_Healthcare.pdf

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Health and Social Care Bill

Under the Health and Social Care Bill, health and wellbeing boards will be established in every upper-tier local authority in England on a statutory basis.

The benefits of establishing these boards will be to increase the influence of local people in shaping services through democratically elected councillors and local HealthWatch, so that services can better meet local need, be more joined up for the people using them and improve integrated working across local services working to meet the needs of, for example, victims of violence.

Local authorities and the Clinical Commissioning Groups will be required to prepare Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNA) through the health and wellbeing board. This is to ensure that each area develops a comprehensive analysis of the current and future needs of their area (i.e. including those relevant to health, social care, public health, and children’s services) and possibly involving an analysis of the wider determinants of health.

Local authorities will be able to delegate any local authority function to the health and wellbeing board except for scrutiny in relation to health services.

Based on the JSNA, members of the health and wellbeing board will be required to develop a joint health and wellbeing strategy (JHWS) for their area. Local HealthWatch will also have a key role in ensuring the needs of the most vulnerable are heard and addressed. It will be up to each local health and wellbeing board to take account of vulnerable groups in the most appropriate way.

Global Action Tackling VAWG

Lynne Featherstone MP was delighted to be appointed (in November 2010) to the role of Ministerial Champion for Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Overseas for the UK government. She has used her time since the appointment to have initial discussions with key partners in government and globally to help her understand the issues we are dealing with.

Ms Featherstone has just returned from a two-country visit to India and Nepal as part of her first overseas visit in this current capacity. The choice of Nepal was in part due to its efforts, supported by the UK, to address widespread violations of women’s rights, including alarming levels of violence against women and girls. Ms Featherstone found the visit very useful and there were productive discussions of women’s and Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) rights, and violence against women in Nepal. Many appreciated hearing of UK experience and lessons learned.

In India, Ms Featherstone met with key people to promote the UK Government’s global, evidence-based approach to tackling VAW. She also highlighted UK activity on LGBT rights, and was able to find out more about the implications for India and the wider region following the 2009 Delhi High Court ruling which decriminalised homosexuality.

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International Women's Day – 8 March 2011

The FCO marked International Women's Day in London and in over 30 Embassies and High Commissions worldwide. Examples of activities included a panel discussion in Islamabad jointly hosted by the High Commission and the UN on violence against women; a press article on tackling gender stereotyping by our Ambassador in Guatemala City and a new page on the local Embassy website in Baghdad dedicated to our work to support women's rights. In London, the FCO hosted a lunch-time seminar entitled 'Building Stability Overseas: why women are critical to security and justice'.

Human Rights Council 17th Session, Geneva

The 17th Session of the Human Rights Council (HRC) was held in Geneva from 30 May – 17 June. The UK co-sponsored robust and progressive language in the resolution on "Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women: ensuring due diligence in protection" which invites the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights to prepare a study on the issue of violence against women and girls and disability for discussion at the HRC in 2012. The Annual Day Discussion on Women's Rights this year focussed on violence against women.

Group discussion centred around the challenges, including lack of education within law enforcement, and the need for domestic legal frameworks to effectively tackle impunity. Combating violence against women required national, regional and international effort. A number of Member States, including the United Kingdom, made national statements.

Further details can be found on www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/17session/

UN VAWG Action

The UN Women's Strategic Plan was approved by the Executive Board on 30th June, and the UK has announced core funding of £10m a year for the next two years, making us the second largest donor in 2011. Tackling violence against girls and women is one of six strategic priorities for UN Women and we will be working closely with the agency on this.

Stalking Strategy

Progress is being made on the seven actions to tackle stalking in the Violence Against Women and Girls Action Plan. A National Stalking Strategy group of officials from across Government, as well as police and prosecution experts has been meeting on a monthly basis to take forward these actions including on cyber stalking, the impact of legislation and learning from best practice and other countries. The group is currently focussed on preparations for a series of regional roadshows, with more details to be finalised shortly.

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National Stalking Awareness Week

To support National Stalking Awareness Week (11-15th April) the Home Secretary reaffirmed the government's commitment to tackle stalking.

The Government is committed to take specific action across government to improve our response to stalking as part of our wider work to tackle violence against women and girls. Actions include:

- continuing to fund the National Stalking Helpline over the spending review period, and helping to develop its capabilities further.
- Helping to build links between the different agencies who are working on stalking, cyber-crime and communications data to deliver an effective response to cyber stalking.
- learning from the Fixated Threat Assessment Centre, the specialist unit that deals with stalking of high profile individuals, by looking at how its methods could be applied to mainstream policing.

Armed Forces News

Single-Service policy leads from the Royal Navy, the Army and the Royal Air Force met on 5 July to discuss how the Armed Forces can take work forward to ensure employees and their families understand the nature of VAWG and how to tackle it if they are affected by it. Further meetings are planned with the North East Hampshire Domestic Violence Forum and with the Service Families' Federations and other Welfare organisations following which a Ministry of Defence Action Plan will be developed.

Teenage Relationship Abuse Campaign re-launch

The Home Office media campaign to help prevent teenagers from becoming victims and perpetrators of abusive relationships is to be re-launched on the 1st September. The campaign will be an innovative 'social media' launch primarily aimed at online channels, and will use online adverts, TV, cinema, posters, youth TV, etc to get the message across. Specifically, the campaign aims to prevent the future onset of violence by:

- De-normalising violent and abusive behaviour in relationships
- Showing clearly that such abuse is wrong and unacceptable
- Helping young people recognise abusive behaviour
- Empowering young people to avoid or challenge abusive behaviour
- Encouraging peer discussion and mutual support about the issue
- Signposting young people to professional advice and help if needed

The Home Office is working with voluntary organisations on the campaign such as Against Violence and Abuse (AVA), Women's Aid, Refuge and NSPCC as well as with other Government Departments.

Support information for teachers regarding the Teenage Relationship Abuse Campaign went live on the Department for Education website on 20th July, and can be found at: <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/pastoralcare/health/a00192525/teenage-relationship-abuse-campaign>

If you are interested in finding out more about this campaign please contact Kerry.Charlesworth@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

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The Reg Bailey Review

Reg Bailey's report "Letting Children be Children – Report of an Independent Review of the Commercialisation and Sexualisation of Childhood" was published on 6 June. It found that for many children and young people today sexualised imagery has become an "all-pervasive backdrop or wallpaper" to their lives, whether on television, the internet, in shops or public spaces.

A majority of the 15 recommendations for action in the report aim to encourage businesses and regulators to be responsive to the views of parents when they take decisions that may impact on children's lives. They include:

- protecting children from sexualised imagery contained in on-street advertising such as billboards,
- regulators creating a single website to act as an interface between themselves and parents that will clearly set out what parents can do if they feel a programme, product or service is inappropriate for children and which could also provide an avenue for parents and others to provide informal feedback and comments,
- all businesses that market goods or services to children having a 'one-click' link to their complaints service.

The review found there was a good deal of willingness on the part of the industry (media and advertising) to embrace change voluntarily and without the need to resort immediately to new laws or regulations. It is intended that these recommendations should work within the existing legal framework and most can be achieved through voluntary action rather than legislation. Links to more information about the review and a link to the report can be found at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/b0074315/bailey-review>

Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs)

On 13th April, the Home Office implemented section 9 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004. This means that local areas and agencies are now expected to undertake a multi-agency review following a domestic violence homicide to assist all those involved in the review process in identifying the lessons that can be learned from domestic homicides with a view to preventing future homicides and violence. The provision also allows the Secretary of State, in particular cases (e.g. when a local area fails to initiate a review itself) to direct that a specified person or body establishes or participates in a review. Section 9 also introduces a duty for every person or body establishing or participating in the review to have regard to statutory guidance.

The Home Office DHR quality assurance panel, which will assess the final reports from all DHRs, met for the first time on the 27th July to discuss terms of reference and future steps. Statutory guidance on DHRs can be found at: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/crime/DHR-guidance?view=Binary>

ISVA Training bursaries

The Home Office is funding 87 ISVA posts and is now making available training bursaries of £2,000 to voluntary sector organisations which bid successfully for ISVA funding in 2011/12-2014/15. These bursaries are to be used to ensure that Home Office funded ISVAs are properly equipped to undertake their role.

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Community Action Against Crime

The Home Office is inviting applications from the voluntary sector for two funds: The Innovation Fund and The Choices Fund.

The Innovation Fund

The purpose of the Innovation Fund is to stimulate creative new approaches to tackling crime. It will do so by empowering local groups to develop innovative projects to tackle local community safety problems. The Home Office is particularly keen for the fund to be made available to grass roots community activists who are not traditional recipients of government grants.

The Innovation Fund will be worth £5 million in 2011-12 with a further £5 million set aside for 2012-13. Applications will be invited from voluntary and community sector organisations. Full details of the application process for 2011-12 will be made available on the Home Office website shortly.

Further enquiries on the 'Community Action Against Crime: Innovation Fund' should be addressed to:
CAACFunding@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

The Choices Fund

Choices is focused on preventing and reducing substance misuse and related offending amongst vulnerable groups of young people who are most likely to be at risk of, or already starting to become involved in substance misuse or related offending.

The programme is designed to encourage the national voluntary sector to support small grass roots organisations to deliver targeted prevention and early intervention programmes. We also want to encourage the transfer of skills, expertise and knowledge between national voluntary sector organisations and smaller voluntary sector and community groups in developing local approaches and practices that are effective in reducing substance misuse and related offending.

The Home Office has made £4 million available in 2011-12 and is inviting applications from national voluntary sector organisations. The deadline for applications is Thursday 18 August 2011. Further information on Choices and how to apply is available at:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime/reducing-reoffending/ion/choices>