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Lord Chancellor

**Rt Hon Priti Patel MP**

Home Secretary

**Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP**

Secretary of State for Education

**24 December 2020**

# Prime Minister’s Virtual Summit on Hidden Harms: Update to Attendees

The Prime Minister’s Hidden Harms Virtual Summit on 21 May 2020 represented a unique opportunity for survivors and other voices from across Government, the NHS, law enforcement, charities and frontline services to come together to share emerging best practices and identify areas for the Government to take further action.

Hidden crimes typically take place behind closed doors and so necessary lockdown measures in response to the Coronavirus pandemic have risked making these crimes more prevalent and less visible. The reintroduction of restrictions during the autumn and winter months has made those actions committed to in the Hidden Harms action plan all the more important.

Since the Summit, we have continued to listen to charities and frontline practitioners working with victims of hidden harms, understanding their needs on the ground and responding with immediate funding to support their continued provision of vital services to victims. Across Government, we have sought to raise awareness of hidden harms through national campaigns aimed at both children and adults, and training for police safeguarding leads and other first responders. We are also learning from evidence as it becomes available: data suggest that restrictions during the first national lockdown period led to victims experiencing more harmful and frequent abuse. This is now informing our interventions and programmes through the second period of local and national restrictions and we are continuing to re-enforce in all Government messaging that there are exemptions in place for people who are not safe in their own homes.

Protecting those at risk from abuse and exploitation remains an absolute priority for this Government, and we are therefore committed to doing everything we can to continue to respond to the issues raised. This update sets out what we have delivered towards these commitments since the Summit. Alongside responses to immediate challenges raised at the Summit, we continue our comprehensive and sustained response to eliminate these crimes through numerous long-term strategies and priorities.

Of course, our work does not stop there. We continue to push further to protect vulnerable children, tackle violence and protect victims, and to listen to the voices of those affected. The Government will be publishing a first of its kind Tackling Child Sexual Abuse strategy, a new Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy and has launched a Call for Evidence to draw on the knowledge and experience of the public to inform it. The new VAWG Strategy will focus on prevention, drive forward improvements in the effort to target perpetrators, ensure that we respond to the changing nature of these crimes, and, most importantly, continue to put victims and survivors at the heart of our approach. The landmark Domestic Abuse Bill will raise awareness and understanding about the impact of domestic abuse on victims and their families, further improve the effectiveness of the justice system in providing protection for victims of domestic abuse and brining perpetrators to justice, and strengthen support for victims through statutory agencies.

Our ongoing efforts to respond to issues exacerbated by the pandemic have presented many opportunities from which we have learned how to better adapt. We have developed ways to engage more effectively across government and with the charity sector; invested and distributed record amounts of funding to support services to enable them to continue delivering their life-saving support; and increased public awareness of the ongoing availability of support services for victims and survivors. Since the pandemic, Government has committed an unprecedented £92 million in funding to support frontline services and help them adapt to digital ways of working to ensure that they can continue to support victims of crime.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Nonetheless, we recognise that the work to protect and support vulnerable people such as victims and survivors continues to be of the upmost importance as we recover from the effects of the pandemic. We are committed to building on the collaboration we have achieved following the opportunity to hear directly from the sector, including frontline workers and survivors themselves, during the Summit. Through this, the Government is confident that we will be able to continue showing the demonstrable action and leadership outlined in this letter throughout any lasting effects of the pandemic and beyond.

Finally, we would like to extend our gratitude and heartfelt thanks to survivors and all those working in the sector, including the NHS, law enforcement, charities and frontline services, for their tireless efforts during what has been an extremely busy and often difficult year. We would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas.

**RT HON ROBERT BUCKLAND RT HON PRITI PATEL RT HON GAVIN WILLIAMSON**

Lord Chancellor and Justice Secretary Home Secretary Secretary of State for Education

# Safeguarding

Charities, social workers and representatives from children’s services came together at the Safeguarding session to discuss ways to protect the most vulnerable in society, especially in the difficult operating context created by the pandemic. While we have made significant progress in providing support to children and families most in need, we continue to work closely with schools and local authorities to understand pressures on the sector and keep future needs under review.

* **To protect vulnerable children**, especially those with a social worker, we have committed to keeping schools open. We have put in place a range of measures to support the return to a full high-quality education programme, including guidance for settings and a new £8m training initiative for educational staff, providing funding and materials for Local Authorities to support staff children and young people’s wellbeing.
* **We also introduced a number of immediate measures to ensure children who usually receive benefits-related free school meals still had access to this support**, while they were not attending school due to COVID-19 and established the Covid Summer Food Fund so that children could continue to be supported over the summer holiday period.
* **To enable local authorities to support families in need**, the Government recently announced a comprehensive package of support, including, the £170m Covid Winter Grant Scheme and a significant expansion of the successful Holiday Activities & Food Programme with funding of up to £220m, reaching all local authority areas from Easter 2021.
* **To address pressures on social care delivery**, Social Work England have temporarily reregistered 8,000 former social workers and DfE has provided £6.5m to place social workers in schools in 21 local authorities to help teachers to identify signs of children at risk of exploitation or neglect.
* **To support the charity sector**, we have also worked across Government to provide £7.6m of funding via the Vulnerable Children’s National Charities Strategic Relief Fund and over £4m to organisations offering specialist support to vulnerable children. Specifically, to facilitate reporting safeguarding concerns and expand services, we have made £1.790m available to the NSPCC so they could expand and promote their helpline. We have also provided an additional £310k to NSPCC to enhance the Childline service offer for children and young people who are at risk of harm by isolation. To enable helpline staff to work from home, we provided a £25,000 uplift for the Lucy Faithful Foundation providing immediate support to national helplines.
* **To support 4,294 children back to school and 2,600 parents with children under 5**, we funded phase 1 of the Barnardo’s See, Hear, Respond service, delivered by national and local charities between June – November. We have provided an additional £4.2m to extend key elements of the Barnardo’s See, Hear, Respond service so they can continue to deliver services which help children to reintegrate into school, join in with youth work activities and provide, support for new or struggling parents until March 2021. This is as part of our response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, recognising the continuing high numbers of children and young people asking for help and support.
* **To protect vulnerable babies**, we are working with local authorities to reopen Covid-secure birth registration offices in all districts. The number of births waiting to be registered is dropping daily and is expected to return to normal levels by the end of the year. Guidance is in place to restore community health services for children and young people. Chief Nurses, together with the Local Government Association, have also written to local directors of nursing to advise that professionals supporting children and families, such as health visitors, school nurses, designated safeguarding officers and nurses supporting children with special educational needs should not be redeployed. PHE is prioritising delivery of the Healthy Child Programme, with a focus on vulnerable children, to prevent, identify and mitigate short and longer term harms. We have set up a cross government working group to continue to monitor safeguarding concerns for this cohort during lockdown restrictions and ensure families can continue to access support.

Recommendations from the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel’s independent review into non-accidental injuries in babies have been shared with partners and are being implemented or likely to be taken forward in further discussion with Panel members.

* **To encourage young people to recognise different forms of abuse, including sexual and physical, report it and receive help**, we launched on 17 November the month-long ‘Something’s Not Right’ communications campaign. The campaign uses animated adverts aimed at secondary school-aged pupils across social media platforms, with young people directed to a dedicated page on Childline where they can access information and seek support.
* **To support survivors of domestic abuse**, we are preparing to launch Ask for ANI (the codeword scheme to support victims of domestic abuse), which will go live in early 2021. Around 330 independent pharmacies, in addition to Boots, have now registered interest in participating, with staff currently preparing for rollout of the scheme with training. We have been in discussions with supermarkets and other industries, who have been very supportive, and will consider how the scheme can be expanded to other partners in the longer term. We have also committed to invest an additional £300,000 to continue to promote the #YouAreNotAlone awareness-raising campaign. Since the launch in April the campaign has reached an estimated 24m people (UK adults) through paid advertising and is supported by celebrities and influencers who shared the campaign to over 100m followers on social media. We relaunched the campaign in November to focus on delivering targeted communications to potential victims, through influencer/partner activity as well as social media and search engine advertising. Also, the review of support in the workplace for victims of domestic abuse has now closed, and a report on findings is due to be published shortly.

# Policing

During the Policing Session at the Summit, law enforcement leads discussed best practices in protecting the most vulnerable. Several areas of further action were identified, and we have made progress against these since the Summit:

* **We established proactive policing pilots to tackle domestic abuse** in Sussex, Cumbria and South Wales. The pilots are testing new means of reaching victims; joint working between police and probation to put in place a robust joint approach for perpetrators in the community on license; and to strengthen the ability to accurately identify high-harm perpetrators, putting in place preventative or disruptive measures to prevent reoffending. Evaluations have commenced with initial findings expected by the end of the year. Subject to this, we will work with the College of

Policing and the National Police Chiefs’ Council to roll out detailed guidance and best practice by March 2021.

* **To make the UK the safest place in the world to be online, we have published the Full Government Response to the Online Harms White Paper**, which will be followed by legislation.
* **We have been engaging with tech companies** since last year, to make clear that companies should not implement end-to-end encryption unless they can do so in such a way that would not reduce public safety.
* **We are investing in the National Crime Agency’s (NCA) dark-web capabilities to tackle the threat of child sexual abuse**, through recruitment of key staff and identification of technical solutions. To date, this has led to 115 NCA operations, with 112 arrests (15 of which occupied positions of trust), 253 children safeguarded or protected, and 1,148 devices seized.
* **We are investing in improving the law enforcement response to vulnerability at both a strategic and operational level.** This includes funding the College of Policing to roll out the Public Protection and Safeguarding Leaders Programme to 110 senior officers this year, developing their ability to manage complex risks and collaborate with partners to safeguard vulnerable people. We are also funding the NPCC’s Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme, which is driving work to share learning from statutory reviews alongside highlighting key areas for improvement through the refreshed police National Vulnerability Action Plan.
* **To develop effective domestic abuse perpetrator programmes, we have awarded £7.17m to 22 Police and Crime Commissioners** to implement perpetrator interventions to reduce future offending in their areas. We will work with the forces to evaluate the impact of these programmes by Autumn 2021 and, depending on its results, will seek to publish findings and guidance for all PCCs by December 2021. We will work with the College of Policing to determine which interventions should be supported going forward.
* **We are also supporting projects to develop technology-enabled prevention**. For example, we are funding University College London to develop a risk assessment tool to identify the most harmful serial perpetrators of domestic abuse. This work, which will be completed by April 2021 at which point the findings will be shared with all forces. The project will also feed into the National Data Analytics Solution (NDAS) diagnostic dashboard to inform those involved in the response to domestic abuse.
* **We launched the first e-learning module in July for first responders to enhance their capability to identify and support victims of modern slavery**. Since July this has been accessed over 4,600 times. In addition, we are supporting the police to tackle modern slavery by funding victim liaison officer training to support victims through the criminal justice process, and targeted prevention activity within vulnerable sectors of the community.

# Victims and survivors

Led by the Lord Chancellor, the roundtable session on victims and survivors was an opportunity for us, as Government, to understand what we could do to ensure that the sector has the capacity and the capability to continue supporting victims of crime. Our commitment to this is reflected in the progress made below:

* **Frontline domestic abuse and sexual violence charities have been able to continue to offer different ways of supporting those in need.** We are pleased to say that we are making over £11m available to domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations to help them to continue to provide valuable support to victims during the pandemic. This is in addition to the £22m COVID19 funding already distributed to charities across England and Wales since May. This money will help frontline charities to be able to continue to offer different ways of supporting those in need, including virtual or telephone-based services as well as allowing them to take the necessary precautions to offer face-face services in a Covid-secure way.
* **We are working across Government to progress the Victims Funding Strategy, which seeks to put the victim support sector on a more sustainable footing.** We have consulted with stakeholders on the key issues facing the sector and are now reviewing the options to establish next steps with departments and ensure publication as soon as possible in 2021.
* **We continue to develop the public campaign to raise awareness of support for victims of sexual violence with a view to launching in early 2021.** The campaign will be aimed at both male and female 18-35 year olds from all backgrounds and older males aged 45+. We also want to reach family and friends to encourage them to support victims and survivors. The campaign will run on social media, digital audio adverts and feature in other media outlets such as magazines and newspapers. We are keen to work with people in the public eye who have spoken out about sexual abuse and who can help us to raise awareness and have been testing the campaign content with several partners as well as victims and survivors themselves.
* **We are promoting and embedding best practice in the provision of support to children and young people who have experienced sexual abuse** supported by the launch of a new £2.8m Child Sexual Abuse Support Services Transformation Fund.
* **We have undertaken an initial assessment of the key functions of both Independent Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence Adviser’s (IDVAs and ISVAs) roles, reviewed existing research in this area, and are now working to elaborate this further, including identifying any barriers to effective joint working.** We are clear that, while IDVAs and ISVAs perform distinct and different roles, the commonalities are such that there are clear opportunities to strengthen both by taking a more holistic approach. Given the continuing pressures on frontline services resulting from the pandemic, and following consultation, we have postponed wider engagement on the functionality review until early in 2021.
* **We developed commissioning guidance for effectively supporting Black and Minority**

**Ethnic (BAME) victims through the local support services funded by government.** This has been developed with input from the support sector and focuses on three quality standards: understanding needs; addressing barriers; and raising awareness. We have rolled the guidance out to Police and Crime Commissioners in the first instance, with the intention to gather their feedback on how usable and practical the guidance is. We will then be able to refine this guidance before rolling it out more widely early next year.

* **We have completed the national rollout of Section 28 special measure for pre-recorded cross examination, which allows vulnerable witnesses to record their evidence in advance of a trial. This can help to reduce anxiety and may support earlier recovery.** The special measure is now available in all Crown Courts across England and Wales. The evaluation of the pilot for intimidated victims of sexual offences and modern slavery offences will be used to inform decisions on any further roll out.
* **We have been working to safely reopen remote link sites in compliance with pandemic regulations, enabling witnesses to give their evidence over live link where this is suitable. So far, we have successfully reopened 19 out of 33 remote evidence sites.** In conjunction with this, we have implemented a revised cross-agency protocol, which includes a new centralised booking process to improve efficiency and enable greater monitoring of utilisation. By January, we will improve the public guidance available to victims and witnesses about how these sites may be utilised for appropriate cases.
1. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/funding-boost-for-rape-and-domestic-abuse-support> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)