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Mayor of London
The Way Forward
Greater London Authority
City Hall
London SE1 2AA

Dear Mayor Johnson,

London Assembly Labour Group response to 'The Way Forward: A call for action to end violence against women'

Thank you for offering us the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on your draft strategy to tackle violence against women. I am responding on behalf of the London Assembly Labour Group as their lead member on equalities.

The Labour Group on the London Assembly is eager to see the Mayor develop a strategy to end all forms of violence against women in our city regardless of ethnicity, age, class, sexual preference and ability. We feel strongly that London should be a safe haven for all its citizens and that women and girls should be able to go about their daily business without having to fear for their safety. Sadly, the reality is that many women still feel unsafe on our streets and thousands of women are being terrorised in their own homes because of domestic violence.

We are supportive of many of the initiatives put forward in *The Way Forward* and particularly welcome the integrated approach it proposes to take. We are also pleased to see how this strategy acknowledges the fact that women can experience multiple forms of violence.

However, we believe that the document lacks clarity about how the recommendations will be carried out and how their progress will be monitored. We would like to see clear deadlines informing involved partners of the timescales they are working within. We also agree with the Greater London Domestic Violence Project that the language being used such as the Mayor 'calls on' or 'encourages' partners and stakeholders is not firm enough.¹ Throughout the document we sense a presumption that the actions that need to be taken to successfully eradicate violence against women can be delegated to other partners. We appreciate the Mayor's argument that he is not a delivery authority but are concerned that, because of this unwillingness to use his powers, the Mayor has missed an opportunity to show the strategic leadership that *The Way Forward* promises us.²

¹ GLDVP response to the way forward – a call for action to end violence against women, July 2009

² Response Boris Johnson to Jennette Arnold, MQT 1665/2009, 17 June 2009

Lessons to be learned from previous strategies

Significant experience and knowledge was gained about violence against women between 2000 and 2008 and we would have liked to see the current administration build on this. We believe it is rather unfortunate that the Mayor felt the necessity to refer to the approaches by the previous administration as 'piecemeal, and failed to acknowledge the links and connections between all the different forms of violence against women.' He also argues that previous approaches lacked full coordination and were based on risk management rather than prevention. This overtly political statement seems to be fed by a lack of understanding of the vast quantities of work done in the previous eight years to understand and map violence against women and to improve safety for women in London.

We would like to refer the Mayor to the several Gender Equality Schemes and domestic violence strategies published by the previous administration. Careful reading will show that the connections and overlap between different forms of violence against women were indeed acknowledged. In fact, issues such as partner (and former partner) rape were dealt with as early as 2001 in the first London Domestic Violence Strategy.³ Work was also done on forced marriage, honour based violence and multiple forms of violence experienced by groups of women such as women offenders or those with substance misuse issues. Furthermore, the second Domestic Violence Strategy focused strongly on the need to provide strategic leadership in order to reduce and prevent violence.⁴

It was interesting to see that, despite the many criticisms of existing strategies, initiatives taken in the past such as the introduction of safer transport teams, the awareness campaign on planning journeys homes and the Safer Travel at Night campaign are acknowledged in the draft strategy.

Rather than dismiss it, we would like to see the Mayor build on the work already undertaken by the previous administration. For example, continual consultation of the third sector and in particular voluntary women's organisations was one of the most important tools to gather information on which policies were often based.

Violence against women steering group

We welcome the establishment of the Violence Against Women Steering Group to liaise with relevant bodies and voluntary organisations. However, we would have liked to see more detail about which frontline organisations and community groups will be represented on this group. It would also have been helpful if a timescale was provided to inform us when the Mayor aims to have this group fully established and when the first meeting is scheduled to take place. So far, we have only been informed that the group will be chaired by Deputy Mayor for Policing.

Domestic Violence

Over the past year, incidents of domestic violence rose by 4.4% and the current financial crisis is likely to lead to a further rise in domestic violence. As we already indicated in our response to the draft equalities framework in February, we have grave concerns about the Mayor's decision not to renew the domestic violence contract and to bring it in-house.

³ Mayor of London/Greater London Authority (2001) *The London Domestic Violence Strategy*, p.31

⁴ Mayor of London/Greater London Authority (2005) *The Second London Domestic Violence Strategy*, p.31

We fear that cutting the GLA's domestic violence budget by £90,000 and axing five posts in the domestic violence team will make it difficult to deal with this rising problem. Also, the knowledge required to deal with this important matter is likely to be lost as a result of these staff cuts and by severing the ties with the Greater London Domestic Violence Project. We hope that the Mayor will take the rise in domestic violence into consideration and put enough money aside for prevention and victim support.

Rape Crisis Centres

The Assembly Labour Group is very concerned about the 14.5% increase in rape cases over the past year and is pleased to see the Mayor acknowledge that London is in dire need of more rape crisis centres to offer long-term support to victims, family member and other supporters. However, we are disappointed that the Mayor has backtracked on his previous pledges to invest £744,000 a year to fund four rape crisis centres and will now only be investing around £466,666 a year, amounting to only £116,666 per year for each centre. With the Chief Executive of the Croydon Rape Crisis Centre arguing that her organisation needs at least £250,000 a year to keep afloat, the Mayor's investment will be insufficient to help run four centres.⁵ Thus, based on the Croydon experience, £466,666 would fail to cover the cost of running two centres let alone four. We urge the Mayor to stick with his crime manifesto and invest £744,000 a year to fund four rape crisis centres in London.

The under-use of Havens is of great concern to the Assembly Labour Group especially because many of its Members have worked hard over the past few years to see them established. The high increase in rape cases indicates that this under-use is to do with a lack of awareness rather than a lack of possible users of these services. Apart from investigating the reasons for under-use, we recommend that the Mayor makes it his priority to raise awareness of the existence of these centres. This could be achieved via a poster campaign on public transport or advertisements in free London papers.

Violence against women on transport

We were pleased to see an acknowledgement of the fact that women are disproportionately affected by theft and sexual offences on London's transport network. Many women fear travelling at night and a large number feel they have to adjust their times and routes of travel to avoid danger.

Prevention and eradication of sexual harassment of women on the transport network can only be achieved if the fundamental difference between sexual harassment and other forms of crime on public transport is acknowledged. Unlike theft or violent assault, there is not automatically an understanding from the perpetrator or indeed from the victim that what has taken place is a crime.

From the casework we have dealt with in the past few years we have learned that a large number of women, especially young women, have experienced some kind of sexual harassment on London Transport, ranging from lewd comments to more serious groping and flashing. However, the majority has never reported this to TfL staff or the police. We have heard from victims who protested loudly when being assaulted on an underground platform with nearby TfL staff doing

⁵ Gentleman, Amelia, "Crisis centre head: 'This is a tragedy for women'" Guardian, Friday 30 January 2009

nothing to help. We have also been made aware that there is no information available on the TfL website informing victims of such crimes or how to report incidents.

We would like to see TfL staff being carefully instructed on how to deal with cases of sexual harassment on the network and would like the website to provide clear information on how to report sexual harassment and for these incidents to be monitored.

There seems to be a real need to increase public awareness of sexual harassment on the transport network not only among victims but among perpetrators as well. We were pleased to see that the possibility to make particular use of advertising on the public transport network was touched upon but would have liked to see more details of how this tool can be used to inform people of this crime. We would like to draw the Mayor's attention to the successful campaign by the Metropolitan Transport Authority in New York. Here, information posters have been put up on the subway, reminding perpetrators of the criminal nature of what they're doing and reminding victims that they are well within their rights to report it and who they should report it to.

Human Trafficking

We were pleased to see the report mention a possible increase in human trafficking during the 2012 Olympics. However, we are concerned that an increase in the male workforce during the construction period could cause a surge in prostitution and increase human trafficking even before the event. We urge the Mayor to organise his planned trafficking round table event as soon as possible so that the possibility of increased trafficking in the run-up to the Olympics is taken into account.

Young people

We have been alarmed by recent reports of the way in which some boys and young men treat girls and their attitudes towards girls and sex. We support the Mayor's pledge to work with the Metropolitan Police to ensure that violence against women and girls within gangs is given top priority.

We agree that prevention work should start early and young men should be given clear messages that violent behaviour towards girls and women is unacceptable. This climate in which girls are treated like sexual accessories that can be passed around among group members can only change if a change in attitude towards women in general is being enforced. We would like to see the Mayor acknowledge the link between this sort of behaviour (and violence against women in general) and the existing sexualisation of women and girls in the media and popular culture.

Women from London's Migrant and Black and Minority Ethnic Communities

A city as diverse as London should have a violence against women strategy that addresses the problems that marginalised groups of women face such as those with insecure immigration status, women using substances, disabled women, women with mental health problems, lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and women whose first language is not English. We welcome the Mayor's acknowledgement that more specialist services are needed to address specific forms of violence such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage. We strongly support the idea of the Mayor working together with the Foundation for Women's Health Research and Development

(FORWARD) and are looking forward to the development of a comprehensive pan-London approach to FGM.

We are also pleased to see reference to the Stella Project and work that has been done to link domestic violence and substance abuse. However, we think the strategy falls short of addressing the issues affecting other marginalised groups and would have liked to see a mention of the valuable work of an organisation such as Women's Aid on domestic violence in relation to disability and insecure migration status.

We would like to point out that there are numerous agencies already operating in London which hold valuable knowledge about specific forms of violence that many women from London's migrant and Black and Minority Ethnic communities face. For example, Southall Black Sisters has been highlighting and challenging violence against Asian and African-Caribbean women since 1979. Another such organisation is the Newham Asian Women's Project which has been working to end violence against women in the South Asian Community since 1987 and has been addressing the racial, social, political and economic exclusion that women in that community face.

Voluntary organisations such as this should be at the forefront of the debate on how to tackle violence against women in the margins of society. They have heard the voices of women in these specific communities for decades and any policies should be based on the expertise already held within these organisations. Doing so would help the Mayor avoid reinventing the wheel.

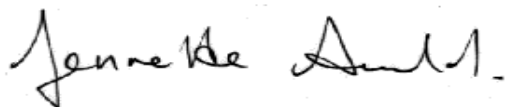
We note that the draft Violence Against Women strategy addresses the fact that many migrant women have difficulty accessing services because of language barriers. Learning the language of the host country is an essential empowering tool for migrant women. We welcome the pledge that the London Strategic Migration Partnership (LSMP) will address the language and cultural barriers and prioritise improving women's access to ESOL. We hope that this will mean that the Mayor will follow in the footsteps of the previous administration and secure a funding package to enable colleges to continue funding ESOL classes. With colleges across London facing dramatic cuts in ESOL teaching, we suggest the Mayor makes this his priority.

Recommendations:

- We would like to see clear deadlines informing involved partners of the timescales they are working within
- The language used in the strategy could be firmer to show direct leadership
- Any strategy should be build on the work already undertaken by the previous administration especially the existing London Domestic Violence Strategies
- The Mayor should provide more detail about which frontline organisations and community groups will be represented on the Violence Against Women Steering group
- Timescales should be provided to indicate when the Mayor aims to have the steering group fully established and when the first meeting is scheduled to take place
- The rise in domestic violence should be taken into consideration and enough money should be put aside for prevention and victim support
- We urge the Mayor to stick with his crime manifesto and invest £744,000 a year to fund four rape crisis centres in London
- The Mayor should make it his priority to raise awareness of the existence of Havens via a poster campaigns on public transport or advertisements in free London papers

- TfL staff should be carefully instructed on how to deal with cases of sexual harassment on the network. The TfL website should be updated so that clear information on how to report sexual harassment is being provided and reported incidents should be monitored
- The need to raise awareness of sexual harassment on public transport should be addressed and it needs to be made clear to perpetrators that their behaviour is unacceptable
- In light of a possible increase in trafficking in the run-up to the Olympics, we urge the Mayor to organise a trafficking round table event as soon as possible
- In order to address the unacceptable behaviour of some young men towards women and young girls the link between violence against women and the existing sexualisation of women and girls in the media and popular culture should be addressed
- There should be more emphasis in the strategy on violence against women belonging to marginalised groups such as disabled women, women with mental health problems and lesbian, bisexual and transgender women
- The expertise held by voluntary organisations in London should be at the forefront of the debate on how to tackle violence against women in the margins of society
- The Mayor should make it his priority to secure a funding package to prevent cuts in ESOL teaching at London colleges

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jennette Arnold'.

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