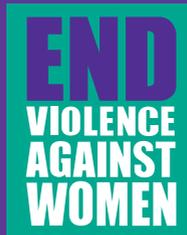


LONDON ELECTIONS 5 MAY 2016



**Ending violence against women
and girls in London:
Questions for Candidates**



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Top Priorities for London's next Mayor

Maintain and build on London's existing Violence Against Women & Girls Strategy – which has already led to new policy and spending to tackle all forms of abuse. This should be preventative and it should be about influencing and leading all boroughs and other statutory agencies.

Keep up with the surge in reporting and support seeking – City Hall must recognise the huge ongoing increase in numbers of survivors seeking help for recent and non-recent abuse, and ensure that policing and support services are there to meet this. There needs to be special attention to both high levels of sexual violence, bullying, abuse and exploitation girls are facing with little respite, and the needs of adult survivors who do not report to the police and whose needs are overlooked when the main focus is on prosecutions.

Protect London's network of support services – survivors of abuse consistently say that women-led, specialist support services suit them best, but they are at risk due to cuts and competition. The Mayor should fund Rape Crisis centres, and BME (black and minority ethnic) women's centres, directly. The housing crisis in the capital is making provision for emergency and moving on accommodation for women extremely difficult – the Mayor should intervene on this.

Speak out and promote a vision for a London where women are safe and equal – the Mayor should make confronting violence against women and girls a high profile part of their work, ensuring sexual harassment is tackled on our streets and transport system, that we end the indifference to and tolerance of the harm of the sex industry.

What is the problem?

- London has a population of around 8 million - in 2015 there were more than 146,000 domestic violence incidents recorded by the police, and more than 75% of the victims were women and girls.
- 28 women were murdered in domestic violence related homicides in London in the year to March 2015 - a large proportion of all homicides.
- In 2015, almost 5,500 rapes were recorded by the police in London (which may represent only 15% of all rapes), with around 9 in 10 victims being women and girls. Half of the users of Rape Crisis services are survivors of child sexual abuse.
- Nationally, a third of the victims of rapes recorded by the police are under 16 years old, and on average 200 rapes are recorded in schools each year. The NSPCC has found that online pornography is influencing teen attitudes to sex and relationships. Girls in London face high levels of child sexual exploitation from adults and peers.
- In London the police recorded 72 offences of forced marriage and around 200 cases of so-called 'honour-based' violence last year, but the actual scale of these forms of abuse is known to be hidden.
- It is estimated that more than 135,000 women and girls affected by FGM (female genital mutilation) live in England and Wales.
- It is estimated that thousands of women and some girls are being exploited in prostitution in London, in every borough, including women who have been trafficked. There are very few 'exiting services' which can help women get out of prostitution.
- A recent survey found that two thirds of women in London have been sexually harassed in public places, including the streets and the transport system, and around 40% have experienced unwanted sexual contact.
- Some girls and women find it harder to seek justice through the police and courts, and can find it harder to access specialist support. Women across London's diverse communities have for decades led the response to this abuse – from raising awareness, to building independent support services, training the police and other frontline workers, and campaigning for changes in the law. The specialist support services across all boroughs are at risk and need support.

The powers of the London Mayor

The Mayor of London has enormous power over policing, our transport system and public spaces, health planning and what is said about London and for London on the national stage. The Assembly holds the Mayor to account and checks they are working in the best interests of Londoners.

If the Mayor chooses to make a priority of tackling violence against women and girls, there will be a real impact on the everyday lives of women and girls across the capital.

It would mean that essential support services which help women and girls who have been abused are able stay open.

It could mean real improvements in the way the police respond to all forms of violence

It would mean proper resources and training on issues such as FGM and forced marriage.

It would mean schoolgirls, young women and older women making daily journeys without fear of assault or harassment.

WOMEN'S GROUPS ACROSS LONDON ARE ASKING CANDIDATES FOR MAYOR AND FOR THE ASSEMBLY TO:

1. Make violence against women and girls a top priority

The problem: Abuse and violence affect thousands of women and girls in every borough across the capital. This includes domestic violence and stalking, rape, peer-on-peer abuse, child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation, forced marriage, FGM (female genital mutilation), so-called 'honour-based' violence, sexual harassment, trafficking and prostitution. Women and girls who are marginalized in other ways, for example younger women, BME women and girls, lesbian bisexual transgender women and girls, disabled women and girls, and women and girls with mental health problems, are often at higher risk of violence and can find it harder to get justice and support. Their needs are often poorly addressed by police and statutory services.

Men and boys are also victims of some of these forms of abuse and there should be work to ensure police and schools are trained and tailored support services are available for them. It is important, however, that we maintain a high level focus on the hugely disproportionate way in which women and girls experience this abuse. Violence is related to women's inequality, and to the choices of those who commit abuse.

What should the Mayor do? The Mayor must maintain and develop London's huge commitment in this area already – since 2010 London has had a pioneering Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy which has led to considerable changes in the frontline response to abuse. This commitment needs to be distinct and high level,

with clear objectives and dedicated funding – which the Mayor has as London's Police and Crime Commissioner. It should include commitments on police training, adequate and appropriate support services, tackling FGM and forced marriage, putting women's needs at the centre of policy and practice on prostitution, and aiming to eradicate sexual harassment in public places in London.

In addition, the Mayor should commit to speaking out and being a voice for London on these issues – showing the way on rejecting victim-blaming and excuses for abuse. The Mayor should continue to work with expert women's groups on developing and delivering the strategy, and should ensure that it ultimately aims to prevent abuse before it happens and is about much more than the police response. The Mayor should use their spending power and visibility to influence the 32 boroughs in London to understand their local needs and respond appropriately. And, the Mayor should work to ensure the whole community responds to abuse – encouraging the sharing of knowledge and best practice between health workers, housing, criminal justice, schools and women-led specialist support services. The Mayor already sponsors interesting work in some of London's schools on bullying, healthy eating and physical activity. If we were really aiming to change attitudes and behaviours in the long term we would get into schools with messages about respectful relationships.

2. Ensure specialist support is available for every woman and girl who needs it

The problem: London should be proud of the unique network of independent specialist support services which have grown up over decades across its boroughs, to support women and girls at risk of all forms of abuse. These include domestic violence refuges and outreach services, Rape Crisis services, and black and minority ethnic women's organisations, Rape Crisis services, BME women's organisations, run by and for BME women who understand the particular dynamics of abuse and know best how to support women and girls. There are also specialist support and advice services for women who have been trafficked and for women in prostitution.

There were never enough of these services given the scale of abuse of women and girls and many sometimes ran waiting lists. But now these services are facing funding difficulties as never before in their history. A combination of competitive tendering for these kinds of services and cuts has seen many women-run services lose out to bigger, more generic providers. This has had a disproportionate impact on BME women-led services. As a result the standard of service and the commitment to being there for women and girls as long as needed is being lost. Every survey shows that women survivors want and prefer these specialist support services but some have already closed and others are cutting back.

BME and other women-led specialist services are also valuable because they are familiar with the way that women and girls experience different forms of abuse throughout their lives, they are based on an acceptance of the impact of abuse and trauma on women's

lives and provide a holistic response to this. These services are usually the first to recognise and respond to emerging forms of abuse – such as being the first to recognise the scale of FGM and trafficking for prostitution, or the presence of online abuse and harassment. Women-led services have constantly innovated the new, tailored support that is needed as these emerge. Generic organisations do not do this.

What should the Mayor do? The Mayor should use their commissioning powers in accordance with the key principles of London's Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy and put the sustainability of the women-led support services who know best at the heart of it. More women and girls use these services than ever report to the police. The Mayor should directly set out contracts for these services linked to specialist service standards, which require providers to show a strong track record in delivering best outcomes for women, and an ability to generate a high level of self-referrals, and incentivize boroughs to do this too.

Specifically, the Mayor should commit to continuing to direct long-term funding for London's Rape Crisis centres, as has been done since 2008, and this funding needs to keep up with the enormous surge in survivors seeking help – demand is at unprecedented levels. And the Mayor should make a similar commitment to direct funding for BME women's support services, and age and gender specific services, which local councils have failed to protect.

3. Domestic violence – make sure London has the best response

The problem: Thousands of women, in all of London's boroughs, face threats, controlling behavior and violence from partners and ex partners. A woman is murdered every two weeks here. Domestic violence related calls are a huge part of the police's work. Experiencing abuse stops women of all ages feeling able to get on with their lives and take decisions that others take for granted. It also sees thousands of children living in fear and unable to have happy childhoods.

What should the Mayor do? On the policing side – our Mayor must build on the work already being done in London and ensure that the frontline response to domestic violence incidents is the best it can be. This needs specialist training for all officers, monitoring of outcomes for survivors of abuse, and ensuring the whole journey through any criminal justice process is responsive to victims' needs. Online abuse should be understood and recognised as part of this offending, and the police should continue the push towards victimless prosecutions.

And, although immigration and asylum are challenging areas, we need to ensure that women and girls who have experienced abuse, which could be any form of violence against women, are not treated as immigration offenders and that their vulnerabilities are recognised. There is a particular problem for 'women with no recourse to public funds' who need emergency housing and support but are not permitted to access it

because of their immigration status. They need advice on their status (many women are trafficked or brought into the country with little knowledge of their rights) so that they can at least clarify their status in the UK from a place of safety.

We need a stronger focus on the perpetrators of domestic violence. Police and other services should be encouraged to focus on those who commit domestic violence, rather than problematising victims. Frontline services should risk assess known perpetrators, and whenever possible refer them to an accredited programme, which can make a real difference in a crime which features high levels of denial.

But domestic violence is not only about what the police do after an assault is reported. The Mayor should use their influence to encourage every London borough to have sound policy and practice in response to domestic abuse, from housing to safeguarding, and they should commit to ensuring that specialist support services, run by and for women, are adequately funded. These include the invaluable support centres that run helplines and provide emergency accommodation, support and legal advice for BME women and migrant and refugee women, as well as medium and long term support for women who need it. Women and girls seeking help often do not present as needing help for one clearly defined recent assault – many experience different forms of abuse over their lives and specialist support services are the best equipped to work with them.

Women and children who have experienced abuse are being confronted with a housing policy which is broken. Much abuse is committed in the home, making it an unsafe place for women and children and resulting in them being forced to leave. Perpetrators regularly remain in the family property with women and children being reduced to temporary, overcrowded accommodation, sometimes for years. A housing strategy which ensures a safe pathway for all women experiencing abuse must be agreed and put in place across London.

4. Rape and sexual assault – keeping up with surge in survivors seeking support

The problem: thousands of women and girls are raped and sexually assaulted in London every year – women and girls from all social and ethnic backgrounds and women and girls of all ages. Girls aged under 16 make up a third of all rape victims. Rape and sexual assault can impact negatively on every aspect of women's lives and can be devastating. Confidential helplines, counselling and specialist advocacy, including criminal justice advocacy, are in short supply but are known to help many women get back on track. BME women and girls, poorer women, disabled women and women with mental health problems, can find it harder to access justice and to get support.

Since the revelations about Jimmy Savile and other high profile men erupted in 2012, there has been a huge surge in the numbers of victims of both recent and non-recent sexual offences seeking both justice through the police and courts, and seeking specialist support. It is critical that our justice system and our ability to support survivors keeps up with this momentum.

What should the Mayor do? On the policing side – the Metropolitan police must continue to learn from grievous mistakes and bad practice. As with domestic violence there should be specialist training for all officers, monitoring of outcomes for survivors, and ensuring the whole journey through any criminal justice process is responsive to victims' needs. Specialist police who work on sexual violence need a high level of continuous training and development and close supervision. It is essential that their numbers are maintained and increased as the numbers of survivors seeking justice increases, and that performance is constantly evaluated and reported on in the public domain. Adequate provision of specialist Independent Sexual Violence Advocates ('ISVAs') based within Rape Crisis Centres improves victims' experience of the criminal justice system. The Met and its Chief Constable should resist any media or political pressure to let up on historic investigations or to treat some suspects differently from others.

But again, sexual violence is not only about what the police do. It is estimated that perhaps only one in ten rapes are ever reported to the police – but many women and girls, and boys and men who are sometimes victims too, do seek support and counselling. The Mayor should commit to funding London's Rape Crisis centres to a level that reflects increasing demand, ensuring that there is support available whenever it is sought. Half of Rape Crisis service users are adult survivors of child sexual abuse, whose needs are often overlooked by many statutory services. These centres need to know their funding is sustainable so that they can employ staff who are skilled and experienced in dealing with the levels of trauma and need which women and girls are presenting with. London's Havens provide a specialist response to sexual violence, in particular supporting the criminal justice system in bringing perpetrators to justice, playing a different role from Rape Crisis centres which support women and girls at any point in their lives and whether or not they report to the police.

There should be a special focus on the support and justice needs of young victims. The Mayor must ensure that City Hall has a firm grasp on the extent and nature of child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation in London. Schools are often unprepared to respond well, and girls assaulted by their peers and/or in the context of gang-related violence, perpetrated by multiple boys and men, can be very frightened of further violence. Funding should be provided for age and gender specific services that understand and respond to the specific contexts in which young people experience violence, which are much more likely to occur in public places and to involve entire peer networks.

5. Focused work on ending FGM, forced marriage and 'honour-based' violence

The problem: Women and girls across London are at risk of forced marriage, FGM (female genital mutilation) and so-called 'honour-based' violence. The current Mayor has run a focused Taskforce on tackling these "harmful practices" and is piloting an intensive approach in some boroughs to try to prevent these abuses before they happen. But for many women and girls, in every borough of London, we know that the

risk remains high and too often the places where they might seek help, including schools and parts of the health service, are not guaranteed to know what to do. And, the specialist women-led services in the community who do have the expertise are under great pressure.

What should the Mayor do? The Mayor's Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy includes comprehensive commitments on forced marriage, female genital mutilation and so-called 'honour-based' violence, and should continue to do so. We need a greater investment in training for frontline workers in police, social work, schools and health. The best way of achieving this is to ensure the specialist women-led services are funded sustainably in order to deliver the expertise needed, including dedicated support for young women. Although it is important that the police do their job and that the law is upheld in order to deter those who might commit abuse, we also need to ensure that in this area the Mayor and City Hall leaders are committed to a more holistic response which addresses the needs of adult survivors of these abuses, as well as potential child victims, again through fair funding arrangements for women's support services. The Mayor should resist any political pressure to bind the response to these issues to the Prevent agenda on 'radicalisation'.

6. Prostitution - putting women's needs at centre of policy and practice

The problem: London has a wide and varied 'sex trade' driven by high 'demand' for the use of women in on and off street prostitution. It is well known that many of these women first experience child sexual exploitation, many are driven by problematic drink and drug use and have other complex needs, and that support services for these women which can holistically support them to get to where they want to be are very few. The 'demand' for 'paid sex' also fuels trafficking of women and girls from outside London and from overseas, with many women and girls coerced and deceived into travelling to London and finding themselves trapped in prostitution. People living in poorer neighbourhoods are much more likely to have their lives disrupted, and their ability to come and go freely in the evenings disturbed by on and off street prostitution activities, than those who are better off. Different borough police forces across London take different approaches to prostitution; some pursue women for soliciting and loitering, some tolerate prostitution at certain times of day in particular locations. It has been rare for any police force or local authority to tackle the actual demand for prostitution, although notably Lambeth, Hounslow and Redbridge are doing so.

What should the Mayor do? The lack of an overarching strategy for responding to the sex industry in London leads to great inconsistency in policing and support services and is unfair on women and local communities. London's existing Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy recognises the harms of prostitution and the need to put this at the centre of policy. The new Mayor should take a strong stand on prostitution and push to end the current *laissez-faire* policing approach, ending the

criminalisation of women and switching the policing focus to 'pimps' and 'punters'. In addition, the new Mayor should see through the current Strategy's commitment to ensuring that there are enough specialist support services to guarantee that women across London can always access an exiting service should they seek it.

7. Sexual harassment – 'I want to be free to roam in public spaces'

The problem: Women and girls experience high levels of sexual harassment in London – a recent survey by YouGov has found that two thirds of women in London have experienced sexual harassment on the transport network or in public spaces, and 40% have experienced unwanted sexual contact, which is higher than the national average for women. Women commonly report that they first experienced this intrusive behavior as girls. In addition, women of all ages make different decisions than men about how and where to travel because of concern to avoid being alone and vulnerable to attack in the evenings. While sexual harassment is not always criminal, and while fear of crime can be greater than actual risk of it, it is clear that women and girls are experiencing a limit on their freedom to move and travel around London freely which is not the same for men.

What should the Mayor do? The police and transport authorities in London have invested in Project Guardian since 2012 to test out what would happen if harassment and assaults on the transport network were proactively addressed. This has led to a huge increase in detections and prosecutions of sexual offences on Tubes and trains, and some increased willingness of women to report offences. The new Mayor should commit to continued investment in this work, and she or he should also personally promote it and use it as an emblematic example of how a city and its leaders can choose to try to eradicate low and high level abuse of women and girls.

8. Women offenders and the closure of Holloway Prison

The problem: Around 5% of the UK prison population are women and the majority convicted for non-violent offences. Many of them have experienced abuse as girls and as adult women, and many have issues relating to problematic substance use and/or mental health. Many are also separated from their children. Holloway Prison in North London is to close, which in some ways is welcome, as this large facility has sometimes been blamed for creating a non-rehabilitative environment. However, the future provision for women inmates is as yet unclear, and moving vulnerable women to detention facilities far from connections with friends and families is likely to be detrimental.

There are also very few girls in the youth justice system, with no age or gender appropriate provision for them, which means they are pushed into services for boys and men. This leaves girls' needs unmet with little understanding or support for their possible experiences of victimisation, both within and outside of the youth justice system.

What should the Mayor do? The Mayor should advocate for the needs of this group of vulnerable women and girls to be high on the list of priorities as new provision is sought and the sale of the Holloway estate is managed. The long-term outcomes for the women in Holloway, and their families, will be poor if their needs are not considered.

A vision for London – women and girls free from violence and the threat of it

The Mayor of London can make a huge difference to the everyday lives of women and girls across the city.

If our police force improves the way it works with victims and pursues justice, there will be a better deterrent.

If the specialist support services are sustained, there will be a better guarantee of good crisis and long term support to rebuild lives when needed.

And if our Mayor makes ending violence against women and girls a personal priority – if he or she speaks out, spotlights, and truly aims to lead and influence on these issues – all women and girls in the capital will be freer to live the lives they choose.

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End Violence Against Women

17-25 New Inn Yard
London EC2A 3EA

www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk

Imkaan

Tindlemanor, 52-54 Featherstone Street
London EC1Y 8RT

www.imkaan.org.uk

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What you can do

Come to our hustings on 12 April in central London and ask the candidates' representatives what they will do to end violence against women and girls.

RSVP to admin@evaw.org.uk

Share our 'MayorWatch' website at vawgmayorwatch.tumblr.com

Let the candidates know that policy to end violence against women and girls matters to you. Send them a message through their websites or a tweet or two:

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[@SophieRunning](https://twitter.com/SophieRunning)

Who are we



The End Violence Against Women Coalition is the UK's leading coalition of organisations working to eradicate violence against women and girls in all its forms.

imkaan

Imkaan is a London based Black and 'minority ethnic' women's membership organisation working nationally to address violence against BME women and girls.