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Deputy Catherine Curtis
Chair, Children, Education and Home Affairs Panel

Via email

7 October 2024

Dear Chair,

Update on progress of implementing VAWG Taskforce recommendations

In advance of the upcoming Quarterly Scrutiny Hearing, and against a background of significant ongoing work, I wanted to take the opportunity to provide the Panel with an update on the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) workstream. In particular, I would like to update you on:

- Progress in implementing the recommendations of the VAWG Taskforce
- The annual reporting timeline
- Developments in the VAWG Taskforce

Progress in implementing the recommendations

I am very pleased to share that the implementation of the following recommendations is complete:

- Recommendation 49 (*introduction of financial support for victims of domestic abuse with less than 5-years residency*): Earlier in the year the Minister for Social Security introduced 13-weeks of financial support through the Income Support benefit for victims with less than 5-years residency. More recently, the Minister has also put in place processes that allow people to ask for an exception to the Income Support residency requirements, for an agreed list of exceptional circumstances (domestic abuse, serious illness and death of a partner) to 3 years, in addition to introducing a broader residency exception for victims of domestic abuse with children (eligible after 1 year).
- Recommendation 9 (*ensure health practitioners are aware of their mandatory reporting duties in cases of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)*): Officers have worked with Safeguarding Partnership Board to support the development of revised practice guidance on responding to cases of FGM. All communications on this guidance have emphasised the existence of a mandatory reporting duty for medical practitioners.

- Recommendation 54 (*VAWG training for immigration officers*): earlier this year 25 officers from the Jersey Customs and Immigration Service (JCIS) received 3 days of training from SafeLives, a leading domestic abuse organisation in the UK. Officers have committed to use their knowledge from this training to inform their practice going forward.
- Recommendation 76 (*formal assessment of VAWG education in schools*): The new iteration of the Jersey School's Review Framework (JSRF) will assess schools on the implementation of the VAWG report recommendations, notably ensuring that young people are educated on these issues both in the classroom and through the wider school culture. The JSRF is being piloted in Autumn 2024 and will be rolled out in January 2025. The new iteration of the Schools Annual Safeguarding Audit will also have specific regard to VAWG education and response to VAWG in each school.
- Recommendation 40 (*mandatory VAWG training for GPs*): The publication of the new Jersey Quality Improvement Framework earlier this year included a requirement that 70% of surgery's GP's must completed Level 1 and 2 IRIS training, which relates to identifying and responding appropriately to victims of VAWG.
- Recommendation 54 (*improving the communication of immigration decisions*): JCIS have developed a new template for communicating curtailment decisions which ensures that the rationale behind the decision is made clear to the recipient. The paperwork necessary to submit an appeal to an immigration decision is now always submitted alongside immigration decisions and better signposting to the complaints process has also been introduced.
- Recommendation 13 (*guidance on online and technology-facilitated abuse*): Guidance has been developed in consultation with SoJP, SPB, Jersey Youth Service and NSPCC. It details information on:
 - what this form of abuse is,
 - how to access support
 - advice on how to secure your technology.

The guidance can be accessed here: [Online and technology-facilitated abuse \(gov.je\)](#). been published on gov.je.

Other significant developments include:

- Recommendation 59: The Housing Minister has been briefed on the findings of the review of follow-on accommodation for victims of domestic abuse moving out of emergency accommodation and these will be published in mid-October.
- Recommendation 15: The States of Jersey Police, the Law Officers' Department and the Courts are meeting in mid-October to finalise the terms of reference for the independent review of the criminal justice system. These will then be used to instruct the reviewer before the end of the year.
- Recommendations 11, 24, 25: The legislative drafting instructions for legislation to address online abuse, introduce emergency barring orders into the Domestic Abuse (Jersey) Law 2022, and legislation to address stalking are all anticipated to land in December 2024.

- Recommendation 12: The development of a centralised dataset on VAWG is well underway and we expect our first round of quarterly reporting to take place in March 2025.

This is only a summary of the work undertaken to date, and is not exhaustive, with many more workstreams under way to meet this Government's CSP commitment to implement the Taskforce's recommendations.

I hope the Panel will be reassured that this programme of work is a key ministerial priority and there is a significant amount of activity underway, with much progress already made.

I am grateful to those Ministerial colleagues who are driving progress on this in their own areas, and to my officers who are diligently progressing this important work.

Annual reporting timeline

The Council of Ministers made a commitment to publish an annual progress report on the delivery of the VAWG Taskforce recommendations, alongside an action plan for the coming year, through the acceptance of Connétable Shenton-Stone's Amd to Amd. 13 (p.72/2023).

When I issued my ministerial response to the VAWG Taskforce report in March 2024, it had been intended to publish the annual report specified in that amendment in March 2025 (on the anniversary of the Ministerial Response publication, to provide a full year picture). However, upon closer consideration of the amendment, this reporting timeline may not align with Connétable Shenton-Stone's intention to review the report in advance of the debate on the Government Budget in November 2024.

I am committed to upholding the spirit of the Amendment, but unfortunately, we are not in a place to issue an annual report in advance of the debate. As a result, **I intend to invite States Members to a briefing later this month to provide an interim update on the progress made in implementing the recommendations and answer any questions you may have.**

Going forward, we intend to revise the annual reporting timeline and publish the first annual report in September 2025. This will ensure that the report better aligns with the spirit in which the amendment was made, and provides Members an opportunity to consider progress on VAWG as they prepare to debate the Budget.

I hope the Panel will support this interim approach for 2024 as a pragmatic way to provide Members with an update ahead of the Budget, and I would be happy to discuss any concerns you may have.

VAWG Taskforce developments

I met with the Chair of the VAWG Taskforce, Kate Wright, last month to provide a general update on our work to implement their recommendations and to discuss the role of the Taskforce going forward.

Further to the completion of their initial work, and the publication of their report, the Taskforce are in the process of considering and redefining their role going forward. I expect this to result in a revised Terms of Reference setting out the new approach in due course.

I am aware that the Chair has also accepted a new role as CEO of FREEDA.

I hope that this update will be useful to the Panel, and I look forward to keeping you updated as we make further progress on this work.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. R. LeHegarat". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Deputy Mary Le Hegarat
Minister for Justice and Home Affairs