

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM

City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA
Tel: 020 7983 4362

2nd April 2020

Sophie Linden
Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime
[By Email]

Dear Sophie,

Re: support for victims of domestic abuse

You will be aware that at Mayor's Question Time on the 19th March I raised concerns about the potential for incidents of domestic violence and abuse to increase as people began to spend more time at home due to the COVID-19 crisis. As I emphasised, for many individuals home is a place of danger, rather than a place of safety.

As the crisis has developed and we have faced more restrictions on our movement here in London, and indeed right across the UK, I have become even more concerned. Domestic violence and abuse data available from China had already sent us an advance warning of the possible consequences of a lockdown. However, we have seen data released this week from France, which has shown a 32% rise in cases of domestic violence since they imposed their lockdown measures, with a 36% rise in Paris. We simply must avoid and mitigate against such a rise in London.

We can already see concerning reports emerging from our lockdown. The national domestic abuse helpline, run by the charity Refuge, reported a 65% increase in calls last Saturday compared with the previous Saturday. Traffic to its website and use of web chat facilities have increased significantly as well. Smaller helplines focused on family courts and male victims of violence have also reported increased calls. These trends will almost certainly continue.

I welcomed the Mayor's commitment to temporarily relax the funding rules for domestic violence charities and refuges to support the anticipated increase in their work during this period, and the £2 million fund supported by the Mayor to help London's voluntary sector. I am also aware that some money is available directly for local authorities from the Government. However, this new £2 million fund for all charities and voluntary organisations will not meet the additional demands that will be placed on those organisations working with victims of domestic violence and abuse. Charities in the sector have been warning and highlighting this issue for several weeks, and I share their concern that not enough is being done, both in terms of support for those services providing direct services to those who need to escape a violent home and in terms of providing information regarding the services that are available to them.

I am aware that good work is already being done on the issue of domestic violence and abuse in London through the Violence Reduction Unit and the Violence Against Women and Girls strategy, but we cannot allow the COVID-19 crisis to undermine the work that is being done.

I would be grateful if you could provide me with information on what work is being done to support domestic violence and abuse charities and services in London during the COVID-19

crisis, and what additional work and schemes City Hall is considering implementing to support the victims of domestic violence and abuse. Additionally I would also welcome an update on any progress that has been made to lobby the Government for additional money for City Hall to support victims of domestic violence during the COVID-19 crisis; the Mayor stated in his answer to me that he would continue to lobby the Government for additional money in this area during the crisis.

If they have not already been considered, I would like the following proposals to be given serious consideration:

- ensuring refuges and direct support services get the additional support that they need, local authorities have always struggled to provide adequate services, so any initiative to quickly tackle the rising problem must come from central government.;
- as has rightly been done with London's homeless population and is being provided for domestic violence victims in France, using spare hotel space in London to house victims of domestic violence and abuse;
- ensure that City Hall leads in highlighting the services available to those suffering from domestic violence and abuse in London

We were already experiencing a crisis of domestic violence and abuse, and I know how seriously both you and the Mayor have taken this issue.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Caroline Pidgeon', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Caroline Pidgeon AM
Liberal Democrat Assembly Member