

Dr Carolyn Wilkins
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Our Ref 1330496 / Carolyn Wilkins
21st December 2020

Dear Carolyn,

SUBJECT: Oldham Council Resolution – Let’s make street harassment a crime

Thank you for your letter on behalf of Oldham council following the 4th November Full Council meeting and the motion that was passed in respect of making street harassment a crime.

I know the Deputy Mayor has previously received testimonies from young women in Greater Manchester who have been the victim of aggressive street harassment and has supported Plan International's campaign calling for firmer action to be taken through the law. We both strongly believe that no one should be abused, harassed or assaulted, either physically or verbally, due to their gender.

The GMCA is continually working to ensure that crimes against women and girls are referenced and considered within the work that the Deputy Mayor is responsible for. This includes the development of a new Gender Based Abuse Strategy which we hope to be in a position to launch in the near future.

This strategy will prioritise activity that tackles the attitudes and underlying inequalities that foster gender based abuse. Furthermore, it will do this by ensuring a collective approach, including the public, employers, the health service, and educational institutions, to work alongside the police and criminal justice system to protect victims and prevent violence and harassment.

In addition, the Deputy Mayor has just launched a new Greater Manchester Partnership Plan to Tackle Hate Crime, where it is acknowledged that the majority of police forces do not currently record crimes against women and girls as a hate crime. During the development of this plan, we surveyed the public on the hate crime priorities for Greater Manchester, and the category of women and girls was supported by 85% of the 800 respondents. It was also evident from the responses that it was believed that women and girls are more likely to be targeted or harassed on the streets and that if such crimes were recorded as hate crimes then this could encourage more people to report incidents and would improve understanding on the scale and impact of such crimes.

The survey also informed us that there was a lot of variation in what was considered hate against women and girls with individuals making reference to street harassment, catcalling, domestic abuse, serious violence, sexual assault and rape. It is therefore important to have national guidance to ensure consistency of terminology and approach to ensure any parameters are clear for practitioners and the public. The ongoing Law Commission review

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to consider the existing legal provisions and protections for women and girls is therefore welcomed and we will be providing a response to the consultation on this work that runs until 24th December.

It is anticipated that in the short term the majority of Chief Constables will await the outcome of the Law Commission Review and subsequent National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) guidance on how this matter should be progressed. We continue to work with the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) and Hate Crime Lead PCC on this work. This is also a matter that is regularly discussed with the Chief Constable, to review what can be done without negatively impacting on existing police resources, particularly with the current efforts to respond effectively to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

In the meantime, the Deputy Mayor and I are keen to ensure that work is undertaken to support women and girls. This includes the provision of grant funding having been made available to engage with BAME women's groups during our Greater Manchester Partnership Hate Crime Awareness Week each February and consideration of victims needs through our ongoing Strategic Review of Victims Services.

Finally, on the 7th December, we also announced the establishment of a new Women and Girls Equality Panel for Greater Manchester, with the stated aim of informing public policy to enable women and girls to live their best life in Greater Manchester. I will ask the Deputy Mayor and the chairs of the Panel to ensure that gender-based harassment is one of the topics the Panel considered as part of its work.

A significant cultural shift is required amongst all members of the public where acts such as catcalling and street harassment are called out and challenged, rather than the individual having to suffer in silence with no recourse available. Without such challenge, behaviours become engrained and deemed socially acceptable. It is something that I and the Deputy Mayor want to challenge and make Greater Manchester as safe a place for everyone to enjoy, no matter their age or gender.

Beer names,
Andy

Andy Burnham
Mayor of Greater Manchester