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Mrs Louise Hunt
HM Senior Coroner for Birmingham and Solihull Area
The Birmingham and Solihull Coroner's Court
Steelhouse Lane
Birmingham
B4 6BJ
Birmingham City Council
City Operations Directorate

2nd December 2022

Dear Mrs Hunt,

Thank you for your letter of 04 November 2022 to the Home Secretary enclosing a copy of a Preventing Future Deaths Report produced by the Senior Coroner following the inquest of Raneem Oudeh and Khaola Saleem. Your letter has been passed to the interpersonal abuse unit as the unit responsible for domestic abuse for a response.

I would like to begin by expressing my condolences to the loved ones of Khaola Saleem and Raneem Oudeh. For a mother and daughter to lose their lives in this way is truly heart-breaking. I understand that through the inquest process, the Coroner has identified an area of concern regarding staffing the domestic abuse team within the Public Protection Unit of West Midlands police force in the handling this case. The Coroner notes that the inquest was told that whilst the case officer understood more needed to be done, the report was filed due to not having the staffing capacity to investigate the case which they believe leaves an immediate concern to victims of domestic abuse and controlling or coercive behaviour.

Domestic abuse is a terrible crime and the Government is committed to doing everything we can to tackle it. Action at all stages of the police response should ensure the effective protection of victims and children, while allowing the Criminal Justice System to hold the offender to account and an effective investigation to be completed in all reported cases of domestic abuse. Our expectation is that the police deal with every victim and survivor of domestic abuse with compassion, empathy, and understanding.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 alongside a comprehensive action plan of other non-legislative measures, will provide further protections to the millions of people who experience domestic abuse. It will strengthen measures to bring perpetrators to justice, as well as transform the support we give to victims ensuring they have the protection they deserve.

Controlling or coercive behaviour is a particularly insidious form of domestic abuse, which we know does not stop at the point of separation. Indeed, such abuse can persist and often increase as the perpetrator seeks to retain control over the victim. That is why through the

Domestic Abuse Act 2021 we extended the controlling or coercive behaviour offence. This means that the offence will soon apply to intimate partners, ex-partners or family members, regardless of whether the victim and perpetrator live together. In order for the new offence to be effectively implemented and to further assist frontline agencies in identifying, investigating and evidencing domestic abuse offences, we are updating the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Statutory Guidance. The updated Statutory Guidance will be published in early 2023, in line with the extended offence coming into force.

The Government's Tackling Domestic Abuse plan, published in March 2022, will see more than £230 million invested including £140 million for supporting victims, and over £81 million for tackling perpetrators over the next three years. The Government are also adding violence against women and girls to the Strategic Policing Requirement meaning it will be set out as a national threat for police forces to respond to, alongside other threats such as terrorism, serious and organised crime, and child sexual abuse. The Home Office continues to fund the Domestic Homicide and Suspected Victim Suicides Project. The project is led by the National Police Chiefs' Council and the Vulnerability and Knowledge and Practice Programme. The project counts all domestic abuse related deaths which, as well as domestic murder by a (current or ex) partner, family member or co-habitee, also counts child deaths in a domestic setting, unexplained or suspicious deaths, and suspected suicides of individuals with a known history of domestic abuse victimisation. Domestic Homicide Reviews must also be considered for all deaths involving a person over the age of 16 where domestic abuse has or appears to have been a factor. This includes deaths by suicides.

The Government want to ensure the police response to domestic abuse is consistent across the country, help increase the confidence of victims and survivors in the police and ensure they receive the compassionate treatment we expect. This is why, in the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan, the Home Office committed to assist funding the rollout of Domestic Abuse Matters training to forces which have yet to deliver it, or do not have their own specific domestic abuse training. The programme aims to improve the police response to domestic abuse, including the investigation of controlling or coercive behaviour offences and to achieve national consistency in the service police forces provide to people experiencing domestic abuse. It seeks to do this by increasing the knowledge and understanding of officers, raising awareness of the varied forms of domestic abuse – physical and non-physical – and providing skills that police officers and staff can use to improve outcomes for victims. In addition, the Home Office have also funded the College of Policing to develop a new module aimed at investigators of domestic abuse.

Alongside implementing the commitments set out in the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan, the Government are providing policing and law enforcement agencies with everything they need to bring murderers to justice. The Government is on track to deliver its commitment of recruiting an additional 20,000 police officers by March 2023. As of 30th September 2022, 15,343 additional uplift officers have been recruited in England and Wales through the Police Uplift Programme, 77% of the target of 20,000 additional officers by March 2023. As part of this commitment, West Midlands Police have benefitted from up to £40m of additional funding this year alone. As at the end of September, the force has recruited an additional 944 officers towards its overall Uplift allocation of 1,218. It is important to note, however, that forces are operationally independent, and the deployment of officers remains a local decision for Chief Constables.

P. Patel

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